

# Ernst Posner: The Bridge Between the Old World and the New

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ERNST MAXIMILIAN POSNER—how should I describe this immigrant to the United States who once held the unofficial title of the Dean of American archivists? His friend Julia Stickley remembers him as slender and quick, and as one who loved to laugh.<sup>1</sup> At a Washington, D.C., memorial service for Posner, who died in Germany on 18 April 1980, various eulogizers mentioned his self-discipline, his sharp and accurate memory, his absolute integrity. They talked of his gentleness, his concern for others, his gallantry, and his basic humanity. James O'Neill referred to Posner's scholarship as "painstaking, but not pedantic."<sup>2</sup> The picture that emerged was of a man of tremendous intellectual curiosity and extraordinary erudition who had natural aptitude for teaching.

Born in Berlin on 9 August 1892, into a prosperous Prussian Lutheran family of

mixed Jewish-Christian ancestry, Ernst Posner was the third and last child of Dr. and Mrs. Carl Posner. His father was an internationally known urologist who held a medical degree and a Ph.D. in biology. In retrospect, of all the family professional role models for the younger Posner, the one whose career most closely presaged his own was that of his paternal Uncle Max, an archivist with the Prussian Privy State Archives who had died a decade prior to Ernst's birth.<sup>3</sup>

After graduating from a Berlin *gymnasium* in 1910, young Ernst Posner entered the University of Berlin, where he began a program of studies focusing on philosophy, history, and languages.<sup>4</sup> The following year he interrupted his courses to fulfill his peace-time military obligations. When he returned to Berlin he took a seminar on U.S. constitutional history,

<sup>1</sup>Interview with Mrs. Julia Ward Stickley, 17 March 1980.

<sup>2</sup>Cosmos Club address of James E. O'Neill, Washington, D.C., 19 May 1980.

<sup>3</sup>Unedited transcript of Ken Munden interview with Ernst Posner, 30 December 1966, p. 7, Records of Editors of the *American Archivist*, 1965–71 [Posner *Festschrift*], SAA archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Hereafter cited as Munden-Posner tape. Other items from the series will be cited as Posner *Festschrift*. Some of the items in this series were used by Paul Lewinson in the preparation of his biographical essay on Posner, for *Archives & the Public Interest: Selected Essays by Ernst Posner*, Ken Munden, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1967).

<sup>4</sup>Folder #98: "Employment USA" (Application for Federal Employment), Ernst M. Posner Papers, RG 200, National Archives (hereafter cited as Posner Papers). Certain folders within the Posner Papers are closed to researchers until 1990, except by permission of the donor. In Spring 1980, the author received a letter from Eberhard Kessel, Professor of History, University of Mainz, dated 11 April 1980. On behalf of Ernst Posner, Kessel granted the author permission to examine the Posner Papers at the National Archives.

taught by the renowned German historian Otto Hintze. As Posner said many years later, the readings he did for this seminar gave him the rudimentary knowledge of American history which would be so useful in the decades to come.<sup>5</sup>

When World War I began, the seminar ended. Posner, a non-commissioned officer in the reserve, rejoined the infantry. He fought in the battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes and was wounded on the Polish frontier in November 1914.<sup>6</sup> After a period of convalescence and garrison duty, Posner, who was by then a lieutenant, returned to the line and saw action in both Russia and France before being mustered out of the army in December 1918. The German government had awarded him both first and second class of the Iron Cross. So highly was he regarded by his military comrades that when the Nazis ordered an association of fellow former officers to vote his expulsion, the group disbanded instead.<sup>7</sup>

Upon leaving the army Posner resumed his studies at the University of Berlin, where he received his doctorate in February 1920. In June of that year he passed another set of exams which qualified him to teach in a *gymnasium*. He now held the two certificates needed for an entry proto-archivist position with the Prussian State Archives, which he joined in the fall. A year later he gained an appointment as a journeyman archivist.

Thus began the German phase of Posner's professional career as practicing archivist, administrator, author, editor, and teacher. For the fifteen years that Posner was associated with the Privity State Archives he performed a variety of archival tasks. He had charge of arrangement and description for newly retired government records accessioned by the archives

as repository for the Prussian state. He also rearranged the older archival groups, or *fonds*, dating from the days of the Prussian monarchy. It was Posner who assisted American scholars during their visits to the Berlin archives, notably Eugene Anderson of the American University, Merle Curti of Columbia University, Teachers College, Samuel Flagg Bemis of Yale, and Walter Dorn of Ohio State.

In 1923 when the Privity State Archives moved to a new building in Berlin-Dahlem, Posner was assigned administrative responsibilities of *Hausreferent*, including building and grounds, equipment, and personnel. At the same time, Posner, in association with the Prussian Academy of Sciences, took over the editorship of the German documents publication project of the era, the *Acta Borussia*, a study of eighteenth-century Prussian governmental administration. Posner also wrote learned articles and lectured at the Institute for Archival Science and Advanced Historical Studies, established by the Privity Archives in 1930. So successful was he in this scholastic setting that, in a 1937 letter of recommendation, Albert Brackmann, Director-General of the Privity State Archives, characterized him as the institute's ablest and most popular lecturer.<sup>8</sup>

That such a letter would be needed by an archivist of Posner's standing was a result of Hitler's accession to power in Germany. What mattered most to the Nazis, vis-à-vis their relationship with Posner, was that he was not genetically a full-fledged "Aryan." Initially, the Nazi takeover resulted in Posner's voluntarily giving up his administrative responsibilities with the Privity Archives.<sup>9</sup> As a result of the passage of the Nuremberg laws of 1935, however, he found himself involuntarily pensioned off from his government archival

<sup>5</sup>"Addendum to Dr. Posner's oral history statement," National Archives Oral History Project: Statement of Dr. Ernst Posner, 19 October 1973, p. 10, National Archives, RG 64. Hereafter cited as Posner/Oral History.

<sup>6</sup>Munden-Posner tape, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup>Letter of Eugene N. Anderson to Ken Munden, 14 October 1966, Posner *Festschrift*.

<sup>8</sup>Posner's translation of a letter of Albert Brackmann, 21 January 1937, included in a *vita* attached to a letter of Solon J. Buck to Ernst Posner, 19 September 1939, Solon J. Buck Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 18: "Ph-Po." Hereafter cited as Buck Papers.

<sup>9</sup>Munden-Posner tape, p. 28.

position. His teaching responsibilities were terminated; the editorship of the *Acta Borussica* was taken from him. Although many of his former archival colleagues continued to see him socially, he became a professional outcast in his native land.<sup>10</sup>

By 1937 Posner had decided that he and his wife Käthe should emigrate to the United States. In order to search out job prospects, Posner made a two-month trip to this country in the Spring of 1938. Through his friends, the Eugene Andersons of American University in Washington, he met the two men who would serve as his most influential early patrons, Waldo Gifford Leland of the American Council of Learned Societies and Solon J. Buck of the National Archives.

At the National Archives Posner delivered a Good Friday 1938 lecture, in English, on German archival administration. But the National Archives was in no position to offer employment to an alien. Unfortunately, no one else in this land of opportunity seemed to be, either. Posner traveled to Cambridge and New Haven where he sounded out officials at Harvard and Yale on job possibilities.<sup>11</sup> In New York he spoke with persons associated with the Rockefeller Foundation and with the Oberlander Trust. He returned to Hitler's Reich hoping that an employment offer would materialize.

From America, Posner's friends counseled patience. Then in November 1938, in the aftermath of the *Kristallnacht* riots, Ernst Posner was arrested and imprisoned in the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. There he remained for six weeks until, through his wife's intercession with a high-ranking German military officer, he was released.

In January 1939, thanks in part to the efforts of Solon Buck, American University offered Posner a lectureship in archi-

val administration.<sup>12</sup> The following month Ernst Posner left Germany for a temporary haven in Stockholm. Still he lacked a visa for permanent entry to the United States.

For four months Posner remained in Sweden. Although the head of the Swedish Royal Archives, fearful of antagonizing the Nazis, prevented Posner from getting a position with that institution, the staff of the archives arranged for him to collect the proceeds from a three-lecture series.<sup>13</sup> It was as part of this series that Posner presented the German-language original of "Archival Administration in the United States."

Shortly thereafter, the American Consul General in Stockholm finally granted American visas to Posner and his wife Käthe, who was still in Berlin. Were it not for Posner's fluency in the American idiom, plus the concerted efforts and pledges of financial assistance by Eugene and Polly Anderson and Merle and Margaret Curti, the visas might never have been forthcoming.

Ernst and Käthe Posner made their ways separately to London, where they embarked on their voyage to the New World. They had planned to have their baggage, books, furniture, papers and all, shipped to them in America, but the war intervened and their possessions got no farther west than Bremen. The Posners started life anew with little more than the clothes on their backs.

Professionally, Ernst Posner's home for the next twenty-two years was to be the American University. There Posner would succeed in carrying out Solon Buck's objective to establish in the United States a program for the training of archivists. This program, in turn, would become the fountainhead for the other archival train-

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 29–30.

<sup>11</sup>Letter of Ernst Posner to Eugene and Polly Anderson, 25 May 1938, folder #81, vol. 2: "Emigration," Posner Papers.

<sup>12</sup>Letter of Solon J. Buck to Joseph M. Gray, 22 December 1938, Buck Papers, Box 5: "American University, 1936–40"; personal history statement of Ernst Posner, n.d., folder #98: "Employment USA," Posner Papers.

<sup>13</sup>Munden-Posner tape, pp. 32–33.

ing courses, institutes, and the like, which are with us today.<sup>14</sup>

Beginning in the fall of 1939, Posner joined Buck as coadjutor in teaching at American University a two-semester course entitled "The History and Administration of Archives." Most of the students of that first class were staff members of the National Archives. Among them were five persons destined to serve as President of the Society of American Archivists: Philip C. Brooks, Oliver W. Holmes, Philip Hamer, Elizabeth Edwards (later Elizabeth Hamer Kegan), and Herbert Angel. Nor should I omit mention of some of their classmates: Sherrod East, Emmett J. Leahy, Karl Trever, Marcus Price, Robert Claus, Fred Shipman, and Helen L. Chatfield. It was, to say the least, a remarkable group of students.

For two years, Buck and Posner taught the class together, each learning from the other. Then, upon Buck's appointment as Archivist of the United States in 1941, Posner took sole charge of the course, assisted by guest subject-specialists from the National Archives.

Today when Posner is remembered by those who knew him, he is often associated with the summer institutes he directed between 1945 and 1961 for American University, in cooperation with the National Archives and Records Service, the Library of Congress, and the Maryland Hall of Records.<sup>15</sup> These institutes attracted students from across the nation and from a scattering of foreign countries. On the average, each of the four-week

annual sessions had eighteen students, although the number of participants ranged from ten to twenty-six.

Posner coordinated the appearance of guest speakers, whose lectures covered such topics as current records, archives administration, accessioning, arrangement and description, preservation, and buildings and equipment. One of his most memorable experiences occurred in June 1951, when President Truman entertained members of the seventh annual institute in the White House Rose Garden.<sup>16</sup> In his 1954 article, "Archival Training in the United States," Posner related that at recent SAA annual gatherings his "so-called 'summer archivists'" had constituted up to 25 percent of the attendance.<sup>17</sup> This select group even had its own newsletter in the form of an annual Christmas message sent by Posner to institute graduates.

Although Posner taught at the American University from 1939 until 1961, only beginning in the mid-1940s did the school have funds available to pay him a salary. For the period 1940 through 1943 his source of income was a three-year grant totaling \$10,800 which Waldo Gifford Leland's American Council of Learned Societies obtained from the Carnegie Corporation.<sup>18</sup>

When the school did put him on its payroll, it greatly broadened the scope of his responsibilities. In the History Department, Posner taught courses on the Middle Ages, Europe, Germany, the philosophy of history, historical research, and the

<sup>14</sup>H. G. Jones, "Archival Training in American Universities, 1938–1968," *American Archivist* 31 (April 1968): 135–54.

<sup>15</sup>Helen L. Chatfield, "Courses in Archives Administration and Related Fields Planned, Instituted, and Directed by Dr. Ernst Posner," August 1963, Posner *Festschrift*; program announcement, "Third Intensive Training Program in the Preservation and Administration of Archives," 28 July–23 August 1947, Buck Papers, Box 5: "American University"; Emma M. Scheffler, "Institute for the Preservation and Administration of Archives," *Illinois Libraries* 33, no. 9 (November 1951): 422–28.

<sup>16</sup>Ernst Posner, "Recollections—The American University Educational Programs in Archives Administration and Records Management—over Three Decades," in possession of the author, published in abridged form in *Information and Records Management* 12, no. 10 (October 1978).

<sup>17</sup>Ernst Posner, "Archival Training in the United States," *Archivum* (1954), reprinted in *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 70.

<sup>18</sup>"Phone message from Mr. Leland," 8 April 1940, Buck Papers, Box 1: "American Council of Learned Societies."

history of historical writing.<sup>19</sup> He also held at various times the positions of chairman of the History Department, dean of the Graduate School, and director of the School of Social Sciences and Public Affairs.

In his 1973 statement for the National Archives Oral History Project, he estimated that matters archival constituted only 15 percent of his work.<sup>20</sup> One of his extracurricular activities as Graduate School dean was the counseling of prospective students, including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, during the days when her husband John Kennedy was Senator from Massachusetts, on the possibility of her working on an M.A. in history.<sup>21</sup> Posner belittled his own administrative aptitudes, but his continuing commitment to the American University, even in the early 1950s when it came close to losing its accreditation, was a definite factor in the university's ultimate survival as an institution.

Of course, the whole notion of assessing an individual's "influence" is nebulous at best. Take, for example, Posner's role in the development of the records management profession. Two months after his 1939 arrival in the United States, Posner presented, at a meeting of archivists in Washington, his classic paper, "Some Aspects of Archival Development since the French Revolution." He concluded it with a discussion of attempts by the Russians, the British, and the Americans to give government archivists the right to advise agencies on how office files should be organized. Under Posner's prodding, American University offered first a single course, and then a series of courses, on

the administration of current records. In 1954, Posner directed the American University's first Institute of Records Management. Over the years, he interacted closely with those most directly responsible for the establishment of a federal records management program. Who can say precisely what effect he had?

Likewise, Posner's impact on the National Archives is difficult to measure. Philip C. Brooks, in his article "The Archival Contributions of Ernst Posner," stressed that those Archives staff members involved in the vital institutional decisions of the period could "attest to the value of his counsel."<sup>22</sup> Posner himself, on the other hand, sought to put to rest the "myth" that he had "exercised any great influence on the evolution of the National Archives in the 1940s and 1950s."<sup>23</sup>

Actually, Posner protested too strongly, as even he, in effect, later acknowledged.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps his greatest contribution to the National Archives was in helping to mold Solon Buck's perceptions of archival problems and solutions. This was especially true in regard to Buck's role as prime mover in the Archives' decision of the early 1940s to adopt the "record group" concept as the basic unit of intellectual control for its holdings.<sup>25</sup> After Buck became Archivist of the United States, he and Posner continued a singularly close relationship. The next three Archivists, Wayne C. Grover, Robert Bahmer, and James B. Rhoads, also looked to Posner as mentor.

It was Posner's closeness to Buck that led U.S. Senator Kenneth McKellar to express such venomous hostility toward the National Archives during February

<sup>19</sup>Memo from Ernst Posner to Dean Derby, 13 December 1960, Posner Papers, Folder #101: "American University."

<sup>20</sup>Posner/Oral History, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>22</sup>Philip C. Brooks, "The Archival Contributions of Ernst Posner," *Indian Archives* 18, no. 2 (July–December 1968): 3.

<sup>23</sup>Posner/Oral History, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 11–14 [Supplement written in Zug, Switzerland, December 1973].

<sup>25</sup>National Archives Oral History Project: Herbert Angel, 24 January 1973, pp. 8–9, National Archives, RG 64; National Archives Oral History Project: Marcus W. Price, 25 September 1972, pp. 4–5, National Archives, RG 64.

1944 budget hearings.<sup>26</sup> In reference to the publication of Posner's paper, *The Role of Records in German Administration*, as a National Archives Staff Information Circular, the Tennessee Democrat demanded to know why the Archives, as he thought, had allowed itself to be duped into endorsing pro-German propaganda. He further charged that the Archives' decision to use cardboard, rather than steel, containers was a Posner-inspired plot to make the records of our nation more susceptible to possible aerial bombardment. And he insistently demanded an answer to the question of why the National Archives had provided desk space for a German alien.

Posner was fearful that McKellar's attacks might interfere with his becoming a naturalized American citizen. This worry proved unfounded, for he and Käthe took their oaths of allegiance to their adopted homeland in December 1944.

The episode, however, had a "profound influence" on his professional career in the United States.<sup>27</sup> The timing of the Senate inquiry was particularly unfortunate in that, during the interval between the first and second day of hearings, Posner, who was unaware of what had transpired on Capitol Hill, signed the necessary papers which put him on the federal government's payroll as executive secretary to the Subcommittee on Archives and Libraries of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe, better known as the Roberts Commission.<sup>28</sup> Senator McKellar was displeased when he learned of this development. The upshot was that Posner was forced to tender his resignation. Not until McKellar left Washington, some years later, would any agency of the federal government feel free to employ Posner, even as a consultant.

Despite limitations placed upon him, Posner contributed to efforts to preserve, and utilize for America's benefit, the archival repositories of Axis-occupied Europe and Asia. In fact, his essay, "Public Records under Military Occupation," helped set the tone for subsequent activities in this direction. He himself, working actively with the Dinsmore Committee set up by the American Council of Learned Societies, prepared lists of archival repositories in order that advancing American armies might at least be aware of their existence.<sup>29</sup> In his essay, "Current Records in Italian Public Agencies," he pointed to the value of captured enemy records for post-war administration.

Among Posner's World War II lists of national archival repositories was a 124-page pamphlet on *Archival Repositories in Germany*, distributed by the War Department. In 1949 the Department of the Army sent him to the land of his birth both to survey post-war conditions in archival repositories in the three allied occupation zones and to review the administration of inactive records of the U.S. Military Government in Germany. During this visit he lectured to archivists in Marburg and Stuttgart as he strove to reestablish links between German archivists and their colleagues in the West. When plans were made for the establishment of a German Federal Republic archives, Posner was approached about becoming its first director; but, since neither he nor his wife wanted to return permanently to Germany, he declined the offer.

In the United States, Posner turned down a different proposal which, had he accepted it, might have resulted in his becoming an employee of the National Archives. This opportunity had to do with an opening as assistant to Sherrod East,

<sup>26</sup>"Confidential: Some Notes on the Posner Affair," dictated 1 March 1944, Buck Papers, Box 18: "Ph-Po."

<sup>27</sup>Posner/Oral History, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup>"Confidential: Some Notes on the Posner Affair," Buck Papers.

<sup>29</sup>For the interrelationship between the Dinsmore and the Roberts committees, see Gerald K. Haines, "Who gives a Damn About Medieval Walls?" *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 97-106.

head of the Departmental Records Branch, the precursor of the National Archives custodial unit for modern military records. Ultimately the question became one of whether he could do "more for the profession by practicing or by continuing to teach it and to organize systematic instruction in it."<sup>30</sup> Posner decided to remain at his post with American University.

As the years went by, Posner's reputation continued to grow. Private institutions and organizations as diverse as the Swarthmore College Peace Collection and the Rockefeller Foundation sought his professional advice, as did former students and colleagues throughout the land. By the 1950s he had already come to be regarded as the preeminent spokesman for archival interests in America. When, after Eisenhower became President, it appeared that, for partisan reasons Wayne Grover might be replaced as Archivist of the United States, Posner counseled Waldo Gifford Leland and others on ways to prevent this from happening. Posner himself wrote to the head of the General Services Administration (GSA) on Grover's behalf.<sup>31</sup> During the 1955–56 academic year, Posner served his profession as President of the Society of American Archivists. In the late 1960s he acted as a bridge in negotiations between the Joint Committee on the Status of the National Archives and the U.S. Budget Bureau's Office of Management and Organization, concerning the possible independence of NARS from GSA.<sup>32</sup>

Posner also made his voice heard in matters affecting the world archival community. In the decade of the 1960s he attended various international archival meetings as an official American representative. At the International Council on Archives Extraordinary Congress, in Washington, in 1966, he was in the forefront of those who succeeded in getting the ICA to undertake a program of archival assistance to Third World nations.<sup>33</sup> Later in the decade he actively worked both to further the world-wide use of microfilm publication sources and to modify the fifty-year restriction period common at that time to a number of foreign archives.<sup>34</sup>

Another dimension of Posner's continuing international concern was his involvement with foreign archival projects. For eighteen years, culminating in 1972, he acted as U.S. correspondent for *Archivum*, the international archival journal.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, for many years he served as a corresponding member of the Indian Historical Records Commission.<sup>36</sup>

In recognition of his achievements, Posner received one honor after another. In 1963 the American Association for State and Local History conferred upon him an award of distinction "for his unparalleled contribution to the more effective preservation and use of the sources of history."<sup>37</sup> Four years later, the Bonn government presented him with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>38</sup> In the United States, American University

<sup>30</sup>Letter of Waldo G. Leland to Ernst Posner, 21 September 1948, Waldo G. Leland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 25: "General Correspondence—Posner, Ernst." Hereafter cited as Leland Papers.

<sup>31</sup>Letters of Ernst Posner to Waldo C. Leland, 5 June, 11 August, and 21 August 1953, Leland Papers, Box 25: "General Correspondence—Posner, Ernst"; Letter of Ernst Posner to Edward F. Mansure, 22 May 1953, Posner Papers, Folder #23: "Wayne Grover."

<sup>32</sup>Letter of Ernst Posner to Julian P. Boyd, 5 May 1967, Posner Papers, Folder #24: "Joint Committee on the Status of the National Archives."

<sup>33</sup>Cosmos Club address of Morris Rieger, Washington, D.C., 19 May 1980.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Posner Papers, Folder #105: "Correspondence with *Archivum*."

<sup>36</sup>Posner Papers, Folder #31: "Indian Historical Records Commission, 1947–1969."

<sup>37</sup>"Awards of Distinction conferred October 4, 1963, on Christopher C. Crittenden and Ernst Posner," press release from the American Association for State and Local History.

<sup>38</sup>Posner Papers, Folder #97: "Conferral of Order of Merit."

awarded him the doctorate of humane letters, while the SAA chose to celebrate the distinguished archivist's seventy-fifth birthday with the publication of a collection of sixteen of his most influential articles, in *Archives & the Public Interest: Selected Essays by Ernst Posner*.

In looking at the bibliography of Posner's works prepared for that volume, one is struck by the diversity and scope of his writings, further augmented in his later years. During the period 1940–67 he published no fewer than sixteen articles and twelve reviews in the *American Archivist*, with other articles and reviews appearing in the *American Historical Review*, *Der Archivar*, *Archivum*, *Indian Archives*, and other periodicals. In addition, Posner wrote essays on *archives* for both *Collier's Encyclopedia* and the *Encyclopedia Americana*, and he delivered a number of addresses on archival subjects.

For the Foreword to the Thornton Mitchell-edited volume *Norton on Archives*, Posner noted:

It would be entirely wrong to consider these articles [which Margaret C. Norton contributed to *Illinois Libraries*] as a merely historical monument, simply because in the meantime the profession has progressed into new fields of concern and endeavor. On the contrary, as one rereads Miss Norton's articles, one is struck by her timeless understanding of the philosophical as well as the technical aspects of the archivist's work.<sup>39</sup>

So it is with Posner's own writings, which range from an enunciation of archival principles to a travelogue of places, past and present, of interest to archivists.

Prodigious as Posner was in his output of scholarly articles, during his years in the United States he wrote only two books,

*Archives in the Ancient World* and *American State Archives*. The former, published in 1972 by the Harvard University Press, was to have been the first volume of a monumental history of archives. Unfortunately, advanced age and ill-health prevented him from completing his task.

Posner's comprehensive survey, *American State Archives*, published in 1964 by the University of Chicago Press, marked the culmination of what he characterized as "the most interesting and satisfying phase" of his American years.<sup>40</sup> Beginning in February 1961, Posner personally visited every state in the Union but Alaska. In a December 1963 progress report, he related to friends how he had felt about composing each of the major sections of the book.<sup>41</sup> He had written chapter one on the history of state archival developments "with gusto." Working on chapter two, the individual state profiles as of 30 June 1963, proved to be "involved," in that it meant coping with myriad details. Chapter three, the summary of findings, was "a nightmare to write"; chapter four, the statement of standards for state archival agencies, was "no fun either," since Posner had to steer this portion through various SAA committee obstacles.

"The archival legacy of Ernst Posner was of course by no means restricted to his *American State Archives*," wrote Charles E. Lee, former President of the SAA and currently director of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, in a letter to me in Spring of 1981.<sup>42</sup> Lee continued his assessment of Posner as follows:

His influence on the profession was great through the annual training institutes which he held at the National Archives and by courses at American University. His greatest influence came, however, I

<sup>39</sup>Ernst Posner's Foreword, in *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, Thornton W. Mitchell, ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), p. viii.

<sup>40</sup>Posner/Oral History, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup>Letter of Ernst Posner to Polly and Gene Anderson, 13 December 1963, Posner *Festschrift*.

<sup>42</sup>Letter of Charles E. Lee to the author, 1 April 1980.



think, through his generous friendship with so many of us. The advice which he gave us was practical . . . ; but beyond that was the feeling that he gave us not simply

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in his accomplishments but in his character, his very being, that it was a fine and noble thing to be an archivist.<sup>43</sup>

I think *that* says it all.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

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