

In Memoriam

CLAUDE HENRY NEUFFER

With the death of Claude Henry Neuffer on 13 March 1984, the world of onomastics lost one of its valued practitioners and advocates. The editor of *Names in South Carolina* for thirty years, he achieved a national and international reputation as an onomatologist.

Born in Abbeville, South Carolina, in the Up-Country, on 2 November 1911, he was the son of Dr. Gottlob Augustus Neuffer and Florence Henry Neuffer. On 1 March 1953, he married Irene LaBorde, then a writer and teacher of English at the University of South Carolina. Their three children are Rene LaBorde, Francis Henry, and Pierre LaBorde.

He received his B.A. degree from Clemson College (now Clemson University) in 1933 and his M.A. degree from the University of South Carolina in 1938. Having completed his formal education, he took a position in English at Georgia Military College, Milledgeville, Georgia, where he taught from 1939 to 1942. To fulfill his military duty during World War II, he served with the Army Air Corps in the China-Burma-India theater, attaining the rank of sergeant. In 1946 he returned to the classroom, teaching for one year at Presbyterian Junior College, Maxton, North Carolina. The following year he accepted a position at the University of South Carolina, where he taught English for thirty years until his retirement in 1977.

In Columbia, his love of the English language and its literature and his devotion to the history and traditions of his native South Carolina combined harmoniously, and his thirty-seven-year affiliation with the University of South Carolina from 1947 until his death in 1984 at 72 years reflected those two loves. This may be seen in the popular South Carolina Writers course which he re-established in the early 1960's. Known throughout the State, this delightful course brought students, on one occasion, from another college to hear Professor Neuffer lecture. The course's continuing popularity was evidenced in his being recalled from retirement in the Spring of 1978 to teach the course for the Southern Studies program.

In addition to the South Carolina Writers course, he established

an elective course, Introduction to Writing, which continues to be offered in multiple sections each semester.

His enthusiasm for word nuances was made clear in an equally popular course, Vocabulary and Semantics. It continues to be the most popular course at the University of South Carolina campus in Columbia. His competency in Greek and Latin influences on the English vocabulary and his mastery of the nuances of the language instilled in his students a love of our native tongue.

Professor Edward F. Nolan, Neuffer's office mate for thirty-seven years, speaks of Neuffer's teaching career at the University of South Carolina: "Because of his sound scholarship, his ability to present ideas clearly, his whimsical humor, and, above all, his concern for his students, Professor Neuffer was one of the most respected and popular teachers at the University. What he said of his colleague Havilah Babcock was also true of Claude himself: 'His classes resembled Robert Frost's poems: they began in delight and ended in wisdom.'"

Alongside his commitment to teaching Neuffer served the Department of English in several administrative and advisory roles through the years. He contributed to the larger University by re-establishing the Maximilian LaBorde Scholarship for English majors and by helping to found the Havilah Babcock Creative Writing Award as a memorial to his colleague and friend, the nationally acclaimed writer.

His love of South Carolina history and traditions was evidenced in his enthusiasm for the South Caroliniana Society, a repository of historical documents and information on the State. He served on the executive board of the Society and, in recognition of his achievements, was elected to President of the Society, one of his most treasured roles. Through the years he donated historical manuscripts to the South Caroliniana Society, and it was his will that the *Names in South Carolina* archives be given to this Society.

Neuffer wrote articles for *American Speech*, *Names*, *Southern Folklore Journal*, *The Georgia Review*, *Sandlapper*, and for numerous newspapers. He gave oral presentations on onomastics to a wide variety of audiences, two of those in New York at the Annual Meeting of the American Name Society. He was pleased to be one of the first South Carolina natives invited as guest speaker at the South Carolina Historical Society's Annual Meeting in Charleston—an honor indeed! On numerous occasions he spoke on onomastic topics before local South Carolina civic, literary, genealogical, and historical societies. In addition he appeared on both educational and commercial radio and television programs promoting the study of names.

With his edition of *The Christopher Happoldt Journal* (Charleston Museum, 1960), an account of young Happoldt's European tour with the Rev. John Bachman (June to December, 1883), Neuffer produced the first of four book-length works. *The Name Game: From Oyster Point to Keowee* (Sandlapper Press, 1972; re-issued 1979), relating South Carolina history through place names, was a collaborative project with his wife Irene. This work has been widely used as a resource book in the South Carolina schools. In 1974 he reprinted J. Gordon Coogler's *Purely Original Verse* (of 1897), reviving interest in the South Carolina bard. *Correct Mispronunciations of Some South Carolina Names* (University of South Carolina Press, 1983), written with his wife, has proven to be very popular, requiring three printings in just one year. This little lexicon of some 400 Palmetto State place names, personal names, and events gives the peculiarly pronounced names accompanied by brief narratives of their origins. The *Southern Partisan* observes that the Neuffers' book "serves as an entertaining accumulation of South Carolina history, geography, religion, culture, economy and humor."

All the aforementioned publications and activities notwithstanding, Neuffer achieved his national and international renown as an onomatologist with the journal *Names in South Carolina*. In 1954 he, along with Havilah Babcock, founded this, the first state placename journal in the United States, and for thirty years he served as its editor until his death. Originally appearing as a six-page mimeographed issue sent to 150 subscribers and "published sporadically" by the Department of English, the work eventually expanded to fifty or more pages, published on an annual basis, telling of the pronunciations, provenience, and folk etymologies of more than 25,000 South Carolina names from *Apeyard* to *Zigzag Alley*. In the first issue Neuffer stated his aims: "South Carolinians have always been eloquent in their choice of place names, whether they are designated a town, a church, a plantation, a creek, a swamp, or even a certain field on their estates....In order to preserve the origins of these old landmarks, this little publication will discuss from time to time odd and interesting names found in South Carolina. The legend or history behind these is often delightful and instructive." And for thirty volumes the "little publication" lived up to its promise, providing, as Horace and Chaucer would be pleased to know, both entertainment and knowledge to readers from coast to coast, from West Germany to the Philippines. Linguists, historians, genealogists, folklorists—each and all have benefitted from Neuffer's patient, painstaking scholarship. His forte was his ability to reach varied audiences, from the eru-

dite scholar to the general reader. And that is no small accomplishment.

Neuffer's personal generosity and dedication in publishing *Names in South Carolina* are well worth noting: through the years the journal was always published on schedule; it was self-supporting; Neuffer served as editor with no remuneration, except "the pleasure of recording the state's onomastic history"; and he received no reduced class load in his teaching responsibilities. The University gained national publicity through this "little publication," while it paid only the journal's mailing costs. Neuffer's selfless devotion to his profession is evidenced in his wife's accolade: He was "the goodest man I ever did know."

The American Name Society recognized the man and his work in the Spring of 1978 with a special issue of *Names*, the *Festschrift in Honor of Professor Claude Henry Neuffer*, with Special Editors the South Carolina natives Raven I. McDavid, Jr. and Raymond K. O'Cain.

With the death of this teacher and onomatologist, widely known as both a gentleman and a gentle man, those who enjoy language and its imaginative uses have lost a true champion. Catullus, in his Poem 101, offers a fitting enconium to Claude Henry Neuffer:

"Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale."

John Stanley Rich

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