

In Memoriam

I. WILLIS RUSSELL (10 May 1903 - 12 February 1985)

With the death of I. Willis Russel on 12 February 1985, the academic world lost one of its most active and distinguished scholars. An internationally-known authority on the English language, this University of Alabama linguist had for over fifty years contributed his research findings to numerous publications. The fields of English lexicology, lexicography, grammar, and usage were his special delights.

Along with two other lovers of the American language, H.L. Mencken and Thomas Pyles, Professor Russell was a native of Baltimore, where he was born on 10 May 1903. Although he lived elsewhere for his last fifty years, he continued to cherish his native Maryland and her speechways. His academic preparation reflects that love, for he took all three degrees in higher education at the Johns Hopkins University, the B.A. in 1924, the M.A. in 1929, and the Ph.D. in 1931. He began his teaching career at Birmingham-Southern College (1929-30) and at Shorter College in Rome, Georgia (1931-35). In the summers of 1934 and 1935, he returned to Baltimore to teach at Johns Hopkins. In 1935 he moved to Tuscaloosa to join the English faculty at the University of Alabama, where he served with distinction for thirty-seven years. He retired in 1972. Following his retirement from academic duties, he remained active for twelve years as a scholar and researcher. Even in the last months of his long and fruitful life, at eighty-one years of age, he was working on a major research project. He was a true and faithful scholar.

Willis Russell is survived by his wife, Mrs. Anne Boyd Russell, Cottondale, Alabama; a daughter, Mrs. Robert K. Johnson, Raleigh, N.C.; four grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Professor Russell's scholarly and professional versatility originated in the exciting decades of the 1920's and 1930's when linguistics was establishing itself as an academic discipline. As a young linguist, he delighted in the ferment revolving around structuralism and soon began to make his own valuable contributions to the international discussion. In 1934 he began his long association with *American Speech* with the

publication of his article on "The *All...Not* Idiom." In 1944 the American Dialect Society named him chairman of its New Words Research Committee, a position he held until 1984. Concurrently, he edited the "Among the New Words" department of *American Speech* for the same forty-year period, 1944-1984, collecting more than 125,000 citations of neologisms. His contributions therein are of inestimable linguistic value, and with his meticulous and devoted scholarship, he set a standard of excellence for present and future lexicologists and lexicographers in collecting, defining and registering additions to the English lexicon. Without making moral or value judgments, he, as a true descriptive linguist, reported accurately and unblinkingly what he observed in the speechways of the American scene. William Safire once called Professor Russell the "Dean of American Neology." Throughout his career Professor Russell contributed essays on usage and grammar to a wide range of publications. He wrote for the annual yearbooks of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *World Book Encyclopedia*, and he added enlightened discussion to the spirited controversy over the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* with his long review of "that" tome in the May 1962 *English Journal*.

Professor Russell also served faithfully as advisory board member of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE), the Thorndike-Barnhart series of dictionaries, and as a member of the editorial staff of *American Speech*. For twelve years, from 1956 to 1968, he aptly guided *Publication of the American Dialect Society* (PADS) as its editor. The American Dialect Society has also gained immeasurably from his years of service as an elected officer, first as Secretary-Treasurer (1956-65), then as Vice-President (1971-72), and finally as President (1972-73).

In appreciation of his many scholarly attainments, the Fall and Winter 1980 issues of *American Speech* were published in his honor. His final linguistic honor came in the invitation to speak before the American Dialect Society's 1983 Annual Meeting held in New York. On that auspicious occasion the ADS continued its tradition, beginning in 1942, of reporting at twenty-year intervals on the state of language in America. Although he was not able to attend the meeting because of ill health, Professor Russell contributed to the discussion of "Needed Research in American English" with his essay on "New Words."

In 1977, he and James C. Raymond edited a *festschrift* published by the University of Alabama Press, *James B. McMillan: Essays in Linguistics by His Friends and Colleagues*. In their introductory essay to this lively, festive volume of essays on dialectology, grammar, and lexicography, Russell and Raymond noted that McMillan has "regularly re-

plenished Thomas Arnold's reservoir of knowledge from which we all draw." This lovely figure can also be applied to Professor Russell himself, for in his teaching, his academic service, and his scholarly contributions to the larger linguistic community, he more than adequately replenished those waters of knowledge from which he so joyously drew in his nearly eighty-two years of living. In all his professional activities—locally, regionally, and nationally—this modest and gentle member of the Religious Society of Friends consistently moved among people with wisdom, tact, and true professionalism. This humane gentleman-scholar will be missed.

Stanley Rich

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