



## Jesse E. Wrench 1882-1958

“For it is difficult to say neither too little nor too much; and even moderation is apt not to give the impression of truthfulness. The friend of the dead who knows the facts is likely to think that the words of the speaker fall short of his knowledge of his wishess; another who is not so well informed, when he hears of anything which surpasses his own powers, will be envious and will suspect exaggeration. Mankind are tolerant of the praises of others so long as each hearer thinks that he can do as well or nearly as well himself, but when the dead is beyond him, jealously is aroused and he begins to be incredulous.”  
*Thucydides—Jowett 2.35.*

I remember first hearing these words from that matchless Funeral Oration attributed to Pericles when Professor Wrench read it to a class in Early European History in the fall of 1920. The other one that stays with me, he did not have to read—he knew it by heart. He said it over and over in the memorable lectures he gave on the religion of the Hebrews:

“I hate, I despise your feasts,  
And I will take no delight in your solemn as-  
semblies.  
Yea, though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your  
meat offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
Neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your  
fat beasts.  
Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs;  
For I will not hear the melody of thy viols.  
But let justice well up as waters,  
And righteousness as a mighty stream.”  
(Amos V—King James Version)

Having wandered with him so many times through all the by-paths of history, especially of western so-

ciety before 1500 A.D., I have felt confident, for a long time, that no one commanded the admiration of Professor Wrench as did the prophet Amos. He seemed to regard the Old Testament prophets as blood-brothers. He liked what they said—and the way they said it. He could quote, too, long passages from Jeremiah and Isaiah as well as Amos and Hosea.

Down through the ages, we made that journey together so many times—from Khufu to Thothmes and Ramses—through Sargon and Hammurabi, Tiglath Pileser and Ashurbanipal—David, Solomon, Cyrus and Darius, and on into the Greeks and Romans. Then into the Middle Ages, where his knowledge got deeper and deeper, with a nod to St. Benedict and Alcuin, St. Bernard and Louis IX. Step by step we went down through the defenestration of Prague and the beginning of Modern Europe where we both began to lose interest.

To some he was a teacher or a student counselor and leader, to others a civic gad-fly like Socrates whom he admired greatly, to others a champion of the poor, the underprivileged and dispossessed. To me he was a constant associate and companion for almost twenty years. Always, he wanted to give—advice, books, his time and labor, assistance and courtesies of all kinds. But you could never repay him. Not only did he not expect it—he would not allow it. He taught all my classes for a month or more one year when I was ill. But never, in all our association, did he ask or would he even allow me to take a class of his more than once or twice.

Those who thought of him as only an eccentric—they never knew him—for they saw only his clothes. The man beneath was as vital and human as any man who ever lived—impulsive at times, and bursting with action, living at a tremendous pace no matter what he did. He had an excellent training and a fine talent for scholarship but writing, for him, was a chore. It immobilized him—it was too sedentary—and he was like a man who had inside him an engine that, it seemed then, would never run down. The philosophers had little attraction for him, unless like Socrates or St. Bernard, they were men of action. He first taught me to love and admire the great St. Ambrose of Milan and my admiration has continued to this day. Somewhere among his papers there was once a great stack of manuscript, translations from that large collection of medieval Latin documents we call the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. He read and translated, then filed them away.

But J. E., as we called him, had another career in addition to his work as professor of history and many here will remember him chiefly for that. I was with him in 1930 when he excavated some rock shelters along the Sac River and began his career as the founder of the Missouri Archaeological Society. Professor Branson who was with us is gone now but Professor Mehl is with us, having only recently retired. To me it was a lot of fine dust, hard digging, and a good time with a fine group of men. To me, the skeletons found there were just bones. But J. E. tenaciously

held on and pushed his idea that the pre-European stage of Missouri's history must be discovered and preserved. With the help of Carl Chapman and many citizens of the state, he saw this work reach a glorious stage of development when he was chosen on October 12 to be president of the Society for the 25th time. This work of his bids fair to reach away out into the future—far beyond where we can see.

A few years ago one of my classmates who had attended J. E.'s courses when I did was President of our Board of Curators. He began, even before Professor Wrench retired, to collect a fund for the endowment of scholarships to be named for him. That fund, although not yet a large one, is there today waiting for those of us who knew him and loved him to build it up to where it will carry on his practice of helping poor boys get through school. Little did we think, when Powell McHaney started this fund,

that Professor Wrench would outlive him by over a year.

I cannot tell you of his charities and the help he gave to people who needed help. Some of the boys he helped to get an education I know because they themselves have told me. Many, many other such things he did I do not know because he would never tell anyone. But there are a lot of people in this state—and outside it—who know these things and will long cherish his memory.

For myself, I can only say, he was a dear friend and companion and I will always cherish my memory of him. And to you who came here today to help us remember and honor him I give my thanks. In an age when too many think only of themselves, his shining example should make us all wish to be nobler men.—*Dean Thomas A. Brady, in address at Memorial Service, Memorial Student Union, November 2, 1958.*

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JESSE E. WRENCH, perhaps the most colorful member of the University faculty and certainly the one best known to most students, continued his many interests to the last. Death came to him in his sleep at the age of 76 on the night of October 14. Earlier that night he had attended a United Nations lecture in Jesse Auditorium. The day before, he had been re-elected to begin his twenty-fifth year as president of the Missouri Archaeological Society, an organization he had helped to found.

He was prominent in activities on and off the campus from the time he joined the faculty in 1911. He became a full professor of history in 1930 and Professor Emeritus in 1953 when he retired after forty-two years of teaching service. His greatest concern was always for the student and he oversaw student elections, chaperoned dances, sponsored the Tiger Claws pep squad, and founded the "Wrench Wranglers" which became the basis for the "Thundering Thousand." Four student cooperative houses are due in great part to his efforts. Upon his retirement the Missouri Legislature passed a resolution citing Professor Wrench as "a symbol of the University itself."

He came to Missouri from Syracuse University where he had been an instructor in history. He studied a year at the American School of Archaeology in Jerusalem before receiving an A.B. degree from Cornell University in 1903. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1907-08 he was with a Cornell expedition to Assyria and Babylonia.

In 1930 he participated in excavation of Indian sites along the Sac River, a branch of the Osage River. In 1933 Professor Wrench helped set up an archaeological survey of Missouri. Until ill health limited his activities in 1950 he participated in many field expeditions in Missouri.

Before the days of counseling, Professor Wrench was the unofficial adviser to students, and although he could be something of a disciplinarian in his own right, he often took a strong stand beside the students. For a period of twenty years he was a familiar figure

guarding the door during registration. He was known as the Missouri Tigers' most avid booster, and never missed a pep rally.

For years Professor and Mrs. Wrench were advisers of the University Cosmopolitan Club; they were "Missouri parents" of many foreign students.

Professor Wrench's Van Dyke beard, his flowing hair and, in earlier years his non-conformist manner of dress, made him an easy mark for M. U. cartoonists. For years he wore knickers because he found them to be more comfortable; he wore a cape because it was less trouble than an overcoat. He preferred a beret as headgear, but he often wore a hairnet to keep his hair from blowing in all directions. A bicycle was his mode of transportation for years before he finally "graduated" to an automobile.

For all his eccentricities, Professor Wrench was in the last analysis a truly conservative educator and a stimulating teacher who was highly effective in the classroom.

He was author of "The March of Civilization," a high school textbook published in 1929, and was co-author of "American Citizenship Practice," 1926.

He was a member of Alpha Pi Zeta, the American Historical Association, American Association of University Professors, Missouri Historical Society, and the Missouri State Teachers Association. Active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, he recently had been made a life member of the Columbia chapter.

Mr. Wrench was born in North Afton, N. Y. on September 10, 1882, the son of Marquis de Lafayette and Sara Minor Wrench. He was a descendant of a Hopkins who came over on the Mayflower; another ancestor, Stephen Hopkins, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence; and his grandmother was a Hopkins who married a Wrench. On February 26, 1906, he married the former Miss Jane Shurter, who survives. He also leaves a daughter, Mrs. W. H. Heller (Ayesha Wrench) '35, of Columbia; two sisters and two brothers.