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**REMINISCENCES ABOUT A "COMPLEAT" SCHOLAR:  
CLARENCE GOHDES**

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Memories crowd the mind when I think about the close ties which have bound in long lasting friendship certain faculty members and students associated with both Duke and Southern Methodist Universities. In this regard I have had thoughts concerning the questions with which William A. Owens begins *A Fair and Happy Land*, one of his family chronicles: "Who am I?" and "Where did we come from?" Similar queries may be asked in relation to friends and associates I have known and esteemed in Dallas and Durham.

"In my beginning is my end"; that familiar quotation from Eliot's "East Coker" is as equally applicable to my own academic experiences, as it is to those of my friends. In late August 1926, after having been awarded the M. A., I left Southern Methodist University to assume the chairmanship of the English department at a small college in Sherman, Texas. Before my departure from Dallas, I heard from Professor Jay B. Hubbell, then head of the S.M.U. English department, an expression of pleasure about the expected arrival of a new assistant professor by the name of Clarence Gohdes, a recent graduate of Capital University, Columbus Ohio, and of the State University of Ohio. By the time of my return to Southern Methodist in the fall of 1927, as an instructor, Gohdes had resumed graduate study at Harvard, later transferring to Columbia to complete his doctoral program. It was not until 1931, when I became a Duke University doctoral candidate, that I personally met Clarence Gohdes. In the interim (1926-1931), I heard so much praise about him that I felt I had actually become acquainted with him. Thus I looked forward to meeting him in person, especially since the only friends I had known previously in Dallas were Jay and Lucinda Hubbell, by then living near the Duke campus.

Much, therefore, of what I can record about Gohdes's S.M.U. experiences is based upon hearsay, some university catalogues, and my own knowledge of life at the university and of the Southwest in general. Certain questions come to mind. What kind of place and intellectual climate did Gohdes discover when he returned to the state where he was born, in historic San Antonio as the son of a minister?

Was he disillusioned when he first glimpsed the then but partially developed suburb known as University Park?

During the Twenties, Southern Methodist was still “an embryo University” or “prairie college” founded in 1915 and situated on a sloping elevation about six miles north of downtown Dallas, itself a burgeoning little city divided from Oak Cliff by the Trinity River. At the time of the school’s establishment, the first buildings, of Georgian architectural design in red brick with white stone columned entrances, had been erected on a 133-acre campus in a sea of Johnson grass and red and yellow Indian paintbrush weeds (In early years this brilliantly-colored weed — the gallardia — was chosen as the school flower, symbolizing, I suppose, the virgin land upon which the university structures were built). There was little landscaping, although a creek-side grove of trees was referred to by the ridiculous name of Arden Forest because the first college performances of Shakespearean plays were given there. It is no wonder that, in the Thirties when I was first introduced to Gohdes, he teasingly inquired: “Are there any trees in University Park now?” In a recent year on the occasion of his return visit to Dallas, a former colleague and I conducted Clarence on “a guided tour” of the now heavily populated suburbs of University Park and adjacent Highland Park. Seemingly he was astonished when he saw huge oak, hackberry, and other types of trees in landscaped yards around spacious homes, a country club and golf course, and small parks. The prairie landscape of the Twenties had long since vanished, and urbanism, as Amy Lowell once poetized, had left its blight on the land, the cowboy and his mustang.

Also during the Twenties, the intellectually-alive young staff members and major English students (Henry Nash Smith, John Chapman, and others) at Southern Methodist felt the influence of Professors Hubbell and John Hathaway McGinnis, both innovative and inspiring teachers. As Mr. Hubbell has written — in his reminiscent *South and Southwest* — the department’s faculty and best students then formed “a small group of friends and lovers of literature who shared with one another our ideas and our hopes....” There existed a strong spirit of camaraderie and of shared labors, notably in regard to cooperative work involved in the editing and publishing of *The Southwest Review*, which Professor Hubbell, as the first Editor, in 1924 had revitalized from *The Texas Review*, then practically defunct.

Those who welcomed Clarence as a newcomer and became his lasting friends were a remarkably alert group of young men and

women, mostly native Texans belonging to pioneer families. A charge of "inbreeding" and of provincialism satirically made by a supercilious out-of-state professor did not dampen their enthusiasm for taking part in Professor Hubbell's plans to stimulate wide interests in the development of Southwestern writing and other native arts. As early as 1922 he challenged gifted students to develop creatively by organizing "The Makers," an informal poetry club whose members gained more than local recognition by the publication of selected poems in a small volume appropriately titled *Prairie Pegasus* (1927). In this same year Mr. Hubbell in his initial editorial for *The Southwest Review*, titled "The New Southwest," appealed to "those promising young writers whom the editor did not know but felt sure were to be found in the cities and colleges of the Southwest." With such possible newcomers in mind, he emphasized the rich unmined literary materials in the region. This early editorial appeal came to rich fulfillment in later regional studies by some of Mr. Hubbell's students of this decade, such as Henry Smith's *Virgin Land*, John Chapman's studies of frontier Texas forts, and Jerry Bywater's brochures about Southwestern art.

Most of Clarence's Southern Methodist friends were members of the local scholarship society, Alpha Theta Phi and in 1948, with the chartering of the Gamma Chapter of Texas, were to be elected as alumni to Phi Beta Kappa. Clarence already was a Phi Beta Kappa. Clarence's gifted roommate in Dallas during 1926-1927 had been a fellow student when both were attending Harvard in 1925. The two possessed contrasting personalities. Whereas Clarence, as described by another S.M.U. colleague, was of a rather serious, drily witty, and pleasant manner, Garland Garvey Smith was fun-loving and very lively. Also, while Clarence's interest, heightened by association with Mr. Hubbell, was primarily in the field of American studies, Garland's was in Old and Middle English. His humor made Garland a delightful teacher of Chaucer's works. According to an early catalogue, Clarence also taught a class in American literature. Both were assistant professors committed to a standard of excellence even when instructing rather provincial Southwestern freshmen and sophomores.

Prior to Clarence's arrival on "the Hilltop," the arbiters of American manners, including Southern Methodist's "conduct guardians," were being challenged throughout the country. Frederick Lewis Allen has detailed in *Only Yesterday* the spirit of revolt then spreading in the land. What he wrote about long-held and strict moral codes in general may be applied in limited fashion to Southern Methodist and

the strong moral consciousness determining the conduct of faculty and students alike during its formative years. Perhaps their dissatisfaction with restraint or simply their love of indulging in hoaxes provoked several of Clarence's youthful colleagues into daring action against authority. I do not know whether Clarence on an autumn week-end accompanied Garland, John Lee Brooks (later a Harvard Ph. D. and a distinguished folklorist), and Herbert Pickens Gambrell (a future leading Texas historian) to Austin, ostensibly to attend a football game. Instead, they discovered in the University of Texas library a copy of the dissertation written by a Doctor of Education dean at Southern Methodist. According to local yarn spielers, they gleefully combed that dissertation for "blacklisted errors," which later they recklessly used in freshman composition and history tests. The dean's discovery of their folly nearly lost them their jobs. Assuredly at Southern Methodist, as elsewhere, an upheaval of values was taking place.

In some areas, especially in state-controlled institutions, the era of the Twenties was disparaged as "The Jazz Age" and students characterized as "Flaming Youth." In the Southwest, except for the University of Texas, Texas A&M College, North Texas State University, and a few others, notable colleges and universities — Baylor, Texas Christian, Southern Methodist, Wesley, Texas Wesleyan, Mary Hardin Baylor, and the like — were church-related institutions upholding strict moral standards. Southern Methodist's official motto, *Veritas Liberabit Vos* ("The truth will set you free"), was in keeping with the dictum that moral conduct was expected of everyone. At Baylor University, where on-campus smoking was banned, visiting Amy Lowell, at a banquet in her honor, shocked the pious Baptists by smoking her special brand of Havana *cigarrillos*. (This violation of the code of conduct later was the subject of an amusing essay appearing in *The Southwest Review*.) At Southern Methodist, a similar ban made on-campus dancing *verboten*; consequently, sororities and fraternities tried to escape observation by entertaining with dances at downtown hotels and the Dallas Country Club (In those days there were no Greek-organization houses on campus, as today). But not long after Clarence left, authority again was threatened. One evening a group of venturesome students and some young teachers — I was one of them — secretly staged a dance in the gymnasium. Our merriment unexpectedly ended when the Dean of Men — a ministerial Malvolio — opened the doors and sternly brought the fun to an unhappy close. A

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"goody-goody" student had tattled about the "sinful doings" in the gymnasium. Following this "sinning," administrative officials actually permitted dancing at the University.

Another association central to Gohdes's Dallas period stemmed from the frequent gatherings of colleagues at the Knox Street Cafeteria, about two miles distant from the campus. This popular "eatery," at a time when the university lacked a faculty clubhouse, was more or less a regular meeting place for Clarence, Garland, Lee, and other colleagues. Here, according to reports, they enjoyed many a talkfest while eating cherry pie, Garland's favorite dessert, and other savory food. Other friends participating in these conversations included mathematician Hemphill (Hemp) Hosford, business manager for *The Southwest Review* and much later university provost, Herbert Gambrell, anecdote-teller par excellence, George Bond, editorial assistant to Professor Hubbell for the *Review*, and John Chapman, a versatile English major who became a surgeon, dean of Graduate Studies and historian of the Southwestern Medical School, as well as author of a scientific book about Lord Byron. Additional friends about whom Clarence has inquired, in notes to me, were the four lively Toomey sisters — Mary, Anne, Dorothy, and Elizabeth (deceased). According to Mr. Hubbell, artistic Anne designed the first colophon for the rust-red cover of *The Southwest Review*. This was a circular emblem enclosing a frontal view of Dallas Hall, the central building of the university. Later Jerry Bywaters, today a distinguished painter and art historian, drew several versions of a figure of a cowboy astride a mustang, an appropriate symbol for a Southwestern magazine (At a recent Southern Methodist alumni gathering, I talked with the three surviving Toomeys, who remembered Clarence with much pleasure).

All of the notes herein given offer but fleeting glimpses of an academic circle of friends associated with an early stage of Gohdes's ever-developing professional life. The next change began at the close of the 1927 school year when, as noted earlier, he decided to return to Harvard, later completing his doctoral program at Columbia, where Professor Ralph Rusk supervised the work on his dissertation, *The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism*. The 1931 publishing by the Duke University Press of this scholarly work was timed shortly after Gohdes began his long tenure as a member of the English department at Duke in 1930. Once again he became a colleague of Professor Hubbell, who had left Dallas in 1927 for a better position at Duke.

The Duke University with which I became acquainted in the

Thirties was a rapidly growing institution emerging from Trinity College and expanding into an independent university. *Veritas Liberabit Vos* could just as well have been applied to Duke, as to Southern Methodist, at this period. President William Preston Few, frail in appearance but energetic in action, was then working with vision toward the attainment of his goal, the development of a top-ranking university which "shall be a shining place where high-minded youth may catch aspirations to true character and genuine excellence,...who have been made strong by the power to know the truth and the will to live it" (*Duke Encounters*, 1977, p. 15). President Few, recognizing that no college or university was any better than its faculty, was diligent in his search for teachers of high quality, recognition, and promise.

By the time of my enrollment as a graduate student in September 1931, President Few's search, as applied to the English department, had resulted in a scholarly staff with diversified talents. To those who had earlier tenure — Professors Paull Franklin Baum, Frank C. Brown, Allan Gilbert, Walter K. Greene, and Newman Ivey White — were added Messrs. Hubbell and Gohdes. Later the American literature group was augmented by the appointment of Charles R. Anderson, Arlin Turner, Louis Budd, Lewis Leary, Edwin Cady, and distinguished visiting professors including Edward Sculley Bradley (the University of Pennsylvania), Floyd Stovall (the University of Texas), and Ernest E. Leisy (Southern Methodist). Another early staff member interested in the American field was charming Mrs. White, who taught a native drama course — at the Woman's College — for which I graded papers, held student conferences, and proctored tests.

During this early period, a sort of "family" relationship prevailed at Duke. English graduate majors made lasting friendships not only by means of course work, but also through the local opportunities for socializing. Generally the relationships between faculty and students were close, heightened by occasional gatherings in faculty homes and apartments. These affairs ranged from dances held at Professor Brown's commodious home, beyond the East Campus, to informal meetings sponsored by the Whites, Hubbells, Gilberts, and others. Informal dances sponsored by the Graduate Club and held in the East Campus "Ark," a small recreation building, as well as the after-dinner dancing in the foyer of the East Campus dining hall, helped us to meet students from other disciplines.

Also various organizations fostered a spirit of friendliness. On occasion faculty members participated in the programs offered by the

Graduate English Club, the state clubs, and the general Graduate Club. I recall going to Chapel Hill for a combined program between the Duke English Club and a similar group at the University of North Carolina. When time permitted, Duke majors attended productions of native plays by Paul Green and other playwrights belonging to Professor Koch's North Carolina Playmakers in Chapel Hill.

Most of the English majors, during 1931-32, were enrolled in Professor Brown's Old English course and, on alternate days, in Professor Baum's Middle English class, both scheduled near the lunch hour. At the close of each session, we were accustomed to rushing toward the Commons where we gathered around a large table reserved for English graduate students. Here our departmental wits — Martin Shockley, Bill Hoole, Merrimon Cuninggim, Tom Johnston, Isabella D. Harris, David Cornel DeJong, Mary Poteat, and others — engaged in spirited repartee. Frequently the lively conversation centered upon our professors. Since American literature majors, even at this early time, outnumbered others, we exchanged ideas, always favorable, related to Professor Hubbell and Associate Professor Gohdes. Through these roundtable talks we also became more keenly aware of the variety of professional chores which these gentlemen performed, in addition to their teaching. One of the most demanding, I presume, was related to the wide subject-matter range of the theses and dissertations under their direction. Notable subjects at this time included American hymnody, the fiction of Mary Noailles Murfree ("Charles Egbert Craddock"), a history of the Richmond stage, early magazine publication in Charleston, William Gilmore Simms as a realistic romancer, and Poe and *The Southern Literary Messenger*. I recall, with gratitude, the assistance given me in my study of the literary treatments of the American small town. On occasion, when I chanced to meet Professor Hubbell in the halls or library, he would pull from his pockets scraps of paper on which he had jotted down titles, saying: "Here are some things which I think you will want to explore." Also, I remember that Gohdes allowed me to develop a term paper centered upon Concord and "the Walkers," Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and fellow walkers (This topic reminds me that at Duke I joined the Walkers Club, whose members, led by redoubtable Professor Gilbert, used to make Sunday safaris "over hill and down dale." One of the faculty members with whom I became acquainted was the German professor who frightened doctoral candidates by the harshness of his oral German language examinations).



The kindly assistance given by Professors Hubbell and Gohdes was in sharp contrast to the attitude of another departmental professor, outside my chosen field, who once assigned a recondite subject for my term paper. When I unwittingly questioned him about a bibliographical problem, he rather witheringly replied: "It's not my business to aid students in this way." A verbal slap which stiffened my sense of self-reliance!

Gohdes's lectures offered sharp illuminations of his many-sided mind: of his firm grasp of subject matter and his keen perceptions. I recall his fluent delivery enlivened by wit, sometimes delightfully satiric, and the arrangement of each lecture's material into a sort of patterned mosaic, skillfully combining major and minor elements. In his analyses of the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and other major writers, he occasionally introduced their family relationships and the significance of their milieu. My annotated copy of Emory Holloway's edition of *Leaves of Grass* offers an example of Gohdes's careful attention to textual analysis.

In his vignettes of contemporary figures, he at times added a human touch, appraising their strengths, their oddities, their "quirks and quiddities." Thus we became better acquainted with the relative significance of Jones Very, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, the Peabody sisters, Mary Moody Emerson, and Christopher Cranch, among others (Later, when I returned to Southern Methodist, I bought copies of F. DeWolfe's *Christopher Pearse Cranch and His Caricatures of New England Transcendentalism* for my students' enjoyment. Cranch's cartoons of "Emerson the Mystic" — "Almost I become a transparent Eyeball" — and "Emerson in Ecstasy Over Nature" — "Almost I fear to think how glad I am!" and other "scribble drawings" aroused considerable risibility among students).

My comments made here about Clarence's professional successes can do little more than verify estimates that already have been made, here and abroad. His extraordinary qualities have brought him wide recognition as a versatile man of letters and as the recipient of a long list of high honors. His position as a Guggenheim Fellow (1962), as the managing editor and then the editor of *American Literature*, and as James B. Duke Professor of American Literature (now emeritus) exemplify his eminence.

Among his books my favorite, which I reviewed for *The Southwest Review* in 1944, is *American Literature in 19th-Century England*, a witty history proving the interest of Victorian readers (from 1833 until

the century's end) in a rapidly expanding American literature. Gohdes's revelations indicate that American literature, heretofore often ridiculed, actually was beginning to serve as an effective tool in creating cordial relationships between England and the United States. Expressive of Gohdes's abiding interest in the field of publishing are the chapters on the Anglo-American booktrade, the rise of periodical literature, the enthusiasm of Victorians for American humor, the critical techniques then used in appealing to the British masses, and Longfellow's amazing popularity (As Bliss Perry has wittily said, to disparage Longfellow was "like carrying a rifle into a national park").

This monograph was a forerunner to Gohdes's future extensive research and revelations concerning the broadening of American literary influences, notably in regard to regionalism. His *Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Literature of the U.S.A.* (1959, 1963, 1970 — dedicated to Jay Broadus Hubbell) and *Literature and Theater of the States and Regions of the U.S.A. An Historical Bibliography* (1967) are indispensable handbooks for many types of readers and librarians seeking information about American culture. Gohdes's critical acumen is also used to fine advantage in his essay, "The Later Nineteenth Century," his contribution to *The Literature of the American People* (1951) and in *America's Literature* (1955 and later issues), a highly-illustrated anthology edited in collaboration with James D. Hart.

A major editorial achievement is a cogent collection, a festschrift, *Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell* (1968). With the assistance of Charles R. Anderson, Ray M. Atchison, Lewis Leary, Henry Nash Smith, and James L. Woodress, Gohdes garnered from twenty-three scholarly men and one woman, from all sections of the country, miscellaneous critiques displaying the vitality of modern scholarship. All of these contributors share with Professors Hubbell and Gohdes, as well as with other American specialists, the rank of "professional students of the literature of the United States—'representative men,' in the Emersonian sense."

Clarence's generosity is evidenced in his many kindnesses, not only toward his colleagues and students, but also to others. His family is especially remembered in book dedications to his wife Celestine and to Eleanor and Dorothy, his daughters, one of whom is a physician in an official position at a hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Once, while his mother and sister were visiting his brother in Dallas, I had the pleasure of meeting these charming ladies. Also noteworthy was

his concern for the welfare of Jay and Lucinda Hubbell during their last years. I am not familiar with the full details, but I like to think that Clarence was the special arranger for the party honoring Professor Hubbell on his ninetieth birthday (8 May 1975), at the home of Professor Benjamin Boyce. The photograph which Mr. Hubbell sent to me pictures the honoree with the following friends and associates: Gohdes, Leary, Bernard Duffey, Budd, Cady, Turner, and Robert Woody. Finally, I remember well a rainy day long ago — the day of one of my oral examinations — when Clarence came by my boarding house to drive me to the library on the main campus. His kindness eased my fears about going to the Tower.

In 1973, following his retirement in 1971 after thirty-six years of distinguished service at Duke, a very special honor was accorded Gohdes. Professor James Woodress, an eminent California scholar, with the assistance of Professors Townsend Ludington and Joseph Arpad, edited *Essays Mostly on Periodical Publishing in America: A Collection in Honor of Clarence Gohdes*. In this festschrift these authorities on American culture arranged a worthy group of unpublished essays by both established and younger scholars whose critiques of significant facets of American literary history were in keeping with some of Gohdes's chief interests. To an all too brief sketch of Gohdes's influential career, the editors added biographical sketches of the contributors, all friends of and some of them former students of Professor Gohdes. Moreover, the extremely wide range of Gohdes's interests was indicated in a lengthy bibliography recording, among other subjects, his definitive writing about American magazines. Obviously this checklist remains an important source for students, librarians, and lay readers wishing to acquaint themselves with a scholar's manifold enthusiasms, especially those relating to Lanier and Whitman.

What I once expressed in *The Southwest Review* (1968), about Mr. Hubbell is equally true of Clarence Gohdes. What I then wrote about Mr. Hubbell I repeat now in praise of Gohdes, an appreciated friend remembered for "his modesty about his distinguished achievements, as esteemed professor, a longtime quester for academic excellence, as honored scholar, far-sighted editor, enterprising creator of humanistic programs..., and influential shaper of American literary scholarship."

For the 15 May 1981 Phi Beta Kappa (Gamma Chapter of Texas) celebration, Professor Laurence Perrine, a gifted colleague of mine,

composed "The Life Designed," a poetic affirmation of the organization's tradition of excellence, the same kind of excellence fostered by Clarence Gohdes:

Thousands resort  
To field and court  
To celebrate  
The Kings of Sport.  
Of other sort,  
We seek to find  
A different kind  
Of excellence,  
Uncommon sense,  
The quest to find  
Knowledge unmined  
And undefined,  
A better life  
For humankind.  
We celebrate  
The life of mind.  
Others resort  
To field and court  
To watch the Kings  
Of Sport cavort.  
We do not mind.  
We are designed  
To mind the mind.\*

\*Quoted by permission of Laurence Perrine, D. D. Frensley Professor of English Emeritus, Southern Methodist University.