Obituary

Jonathan Knudsen
1944–1999

Jonathan Knudsen, Professor of History at Wellesley College and a member of the Editorial Board of CEH, died on 28 August after a ten-month battle with a virulent strain of cancer. His death was premature and a tragic loss for his family and for the German historical community. Those who knew Jonathan will miss his quick wit, infectious laughter, impish grin, and his capacity for friendship. I met him at the Max-Planck-Institute in Göttingen in 1979, and we quickly became friends. Over the years, I came to appreciate his outstanding analytical abilities. We discussed the latest books, theories from the *Sonderweg* to the *Historikerstreit* and the Goldhagen controversy. In each case he had perceptive insights to offer; he was rarely conventional. We got to the point where we could read each other's scholarly drafts with critical eyes without it affecting our friendship.

As a member of the Editorial Board his contributions were manifold. Apart from reading manuscripts, he offered to translate articles from the German, which he did with excellent results (for example the article in CEH 31, no. 4, "Elementary Education, Schools, Literacy, and the Demands of Everyday Life: Northwest Germany ca. 1800"). Occasionally he would call to say that an important book had appeared in Germany that should be reviewed, or to mention a session he had attended at a conference that should be considered for publication. Since he spent many summers at the Max Planck Institute für Geschichte (which he helped to save some years ago when it was threatened with closure), he was always aware of the latest rattling of the skeletons in the discipline of German history. He helped to make the journal more cosmopolitan. Some of the most interesting thematic issues we published in the past eight years were a result of a telephone call from Jonathan. He will be missed on the board.

Jonathan's graduate training as a German historian was about as good as it gets in this country. At Berkeley in the late sixties and early seventies, he could study with Hans Rosenberg, Gerald Feldman, and Wolfgang Sauer, all three first-rate scholars with rigorous standards. He chose to work in the eighteenth century, a period about which little had been published in the U.S., and that even in Germany was something of a backwater until the past decade or two. I remember Rosenberg saying it was impossible to teach a course on the long eighteenth century to undergraduates for lack of secondary literature. Jonathan, Rosenberg's last student, was to help make up for the paucity.

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His dissertation on Justus Möser, which was published as a book by Cambridge, makes three distinct contributions. First, several chapters skillfully lay out in great detail the cultural and intellectual universe of north Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century, the world which produced Möser. This scene setting is masterful and a distinct contribution in itself. Upon reading these early chapters, I remember thinking that I would return to them if I ever had to give a lecture on the eighteenth century. Secondly, the book critically examines all of Möser's writings in a clear and concise manner. Möser has long been recognized as a distinctively German thinker, but little about him existed in English apart from a translation of Karl Mannheim's essay on "Conservative Thought." Jonathan viewed Möser as the beginning of an anti-enlightenment school and deftly shows how he evolved from a practical reformer in mid-century to an arch foe of the French Revolution. Thirdly, the book is a contribution to the study of the German and European Enlightenment. It is a genuinely learned piece of scholarship that demonstrates its author's in-depth grasp of the major intellectual currents in Europe as well as north Germany and integrates Möser into them.

In addition, Jonathan coedited a volume on the German Enlightenment and history, and published articles on themes as diverse as Meinecke, liberalism in early nineteenth-century Berlin, and Friedrich Nicolai. The latter stands out, because Jonathan establishes, quite effectively, that there was a "common sense" aspect to the German Enlightenment centered around Nicolai and his printing firm. The reader is led to consider Nicolai as an indigenous German thinker with some similarities to the writers of the Scottish "practical Enlightenment." His major unfinished project was a study of the evolution of liberalism in Berlin. In a volume edited by Larry Eugene Jones and Konrad Jarausch, Jonathan published an article on this theme which reminds one of his *Doktorvater's* style. The Prussian state is excoriated for its intolerance of unorthodox thinkers and Berlin is pictured as an oppressive environment for liberals. Neither Rosenberg nor Knudsen could be accused of leaving the politics out of their scholarship.

Jonathan and Wellesley College were well matched. As an undergraduate college there was a greater concern with teaching than is common at research universities. When Wellesley established a teaching award in 1982, Jonathan, although only an assistant professor with six years at the college, was the first winner. The students clearly recognized his intellectual engagement, his gentleness, and his ability to combine wit and gravitas.

We have lost an outstanding member of our *Zunft*. He leaves two daughters, Katey who recently graduated from Wellesley, and Eden, a sophomore at the University of Virginia.

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