GEORGE SHERMAN LANE

George Lane's teaching, scholarship, and service to the international community of linguists were in many ways alike: each bore the stamp of his quiet integrity and commitment to the profession.

The classes he offered in Germanic, Indo-Iranian, and Anatolian languages during his last teaching decade followed an identical format. First, paradigms were placed on the board, and their Indo-European ramifications were discussed quietly, even modestly, but with admirable clarity and economy. By the third meeting, one was aware that the chalkboard was the fiction, the paradigm the reality: it shimmered in space as George moved around, through, and behind it to explain how this sample of the language being studied was connected with every component, though his comments were most frequently focused on the morphophonemic aspects. Next, he heard translations with patience—gently correcting errors, whether syntactic or semantic, in ways that removed the sting of having failed not him, but the language. Finally, he previewed the next reading assignment and grammatical category.

Chary of fulsome praise—'not bad' was a high compliment—George was equally gentle, if unsparing, with his critiques. Competitiveness for self-enhancement was wordlessly forbidden: his students first had to value the learning more than the grade, the publication, or the favorable review. Next, they had to praise those whose talents might surpass their own. The business of learning about language was too important, and time too precious, to be wasted in self-aggrandizement.

Born in 1902, George grew up with a dual, comparative perspective, as the relative of two Civil War generals—Sherman and J. E. B. Stuart. The youngest of ten surviving children (of thirteen) on an Iowa farm, he attended the one-room schoolhouse in Clio, and then made his own way: however, his work on the farm kept him from entering high school until he was sixteen. He easily picked up Czech and Swedish from the families for whom he worked, as a cleaner and tailor, to support his education at the University of Iowa. Originally slated for the sciences, his language facility prompted him to discover comparative philology with the encouragement of his first mentor, Henning Larson. Winning the Xanxay Prize Fellowship for graduate study and the Early English Text Society award, he graduated first in the class of 1926; he took his M.A. in English in 1927. With his wife, Colette, who had been his French teacher and would be the typist for C. D. Buck's *Dictionary of selected Indo-European synonyms,* he moved to Chicago, to study with Buck and Leonard Bloomfield.

Early applications to study abroad with Antoine Meillet and Holger Pedersen were unsuccessful; but his try for a fellowship to study in Iceland was rewarded. The Scandinavian languages and literatures, as well as his exchange professorship to Oslo, were George's life-long treasures. In Iceland, he began the

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study of Sanskrit on his own, with a friend, and moved the next year to Paris. Here he studied Celtic with Joseph Vendryes, took one of Meillet's last classes (in Old Church Slavonic) and one of Emile Benveniste's first—'langues asianiques', in which he formed his life-long passion for Tocharian. Because of his preliminary study of Sanskrit in Iceland, he was able to take beginning and advanced Sanskrit simultaneously, working with Louis Renou, Jules Bloch, and especially Sylvain Lévy, whose class was conducted in Chinese, French, and Sanskrit: as much was learned from the code-switching as from the texts. Returning to Chicago, George defended his work to Buck and Bloomfield in four areas; at one point during his examinations, he corrected his mentors on a point in Celtic. He worked with and for Buck on the *Dictionary,* absorbing Buck's laconic manner and his sense of the history of the field, since Buck had been one of William Dwight Whitney's students. From Bloomfield, George felt he gained a freedom of mind which underscored his European training; he, like Bloomfield, belonged to no school except that set by language itself.

In his last years, when several of us needed to learn Medieval Welsh, George diffidently proffered two sets of notes: his originals taken in dime-store notebooks, and a set he had typed up, either for one of his own classes or for a colleague suddenly assigned the language. As the man who apparently introduced the teaching of Russian to the Southeastern US, he was used to such sharing. First came the paradigm which puzzled him; then the ramifications, and citations of a text which displayed the problem or the puzzle; then a summary. The notebooks were from his class with Vendryes; the typescript was his own way of bringing these notes up to date, to clarify the puzzles.

The tone of his articles is similar: his earliest publications follow the format of the later ones. Review the evidence; state the problem. Clarify, resolve; begin again, humbly. While many of his articles dealt with Germanic, Tocharian occupied much of his life. It presented him with the greatest puzzles; and the man who read fables from the *Hitopadeśa* to his young son, and on a bright Carolina Saturday in his favorite khakis could be mistaken for a yardman, could never resist a puzzle. Research, whether it was on how best to restore Whitney's desk (since given to the LSA), or on his several LSA committees, was so central to his vision that he could not keep from sharing this passion.

George served the LSA as President in 1952; he worked on committees for two decades, accrued honorary degrees, taught in Summer Institutes, and even compiled the Index to *Language* vols. 11–15. His publications were as distinguished as his service was steady. In the years before his death in 1981, when cataracts and surgery had prevented his completing his own work, he found much delight in the accomplishments of others, especially when their views differed from his own. He had learned such tolerance, such acceptance early, on the Iowa farm; and he passed those lessons on.[1]

BOYD DAVIS
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

[1] The bibliography which follows has been compiled with the assistance of Drs. James Gaskin and Sidney Smith, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: its lacunae must be my responsibility.

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[2] To the above should be added a Festschrift, *Studies in historical linguistics in honor of George Sherman Lane*, ed. by Walter W. Arndt et al. (University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures, 58), Chapel Hill, 1967. The book contains selected Tocharian pieces by Lane in addition to studies by other scholars.

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