

OBITUARY

Walter V. Scholes (1916–1975)

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Walter V. Scholes, Professor of History at the University of Missouri, died on January 24, 1975. His illness of several months ended an abundant career that still promised to contribute much more to scholarship and to teaching.

Scholes was born in Bradford, Illinois, on July 26, 1916. Between 1938 and 1943, he received three degrees, including a doctorate, from the University of Michigan. An early interest in Colonial Latin American history was inspired by his distinguished uncle, France V. Scholes. Later on, the nephew's research interests moved in other directions; but the relationship with his uncle was constant, and always apparent to close friends and colleagues.

The Diego Ramírez Visita, his first book, appeared in 1946. He had already published a related article in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* in February, 1944. When this early article appeared, Scholes was teaching at Stephens College. Then, in 1945, he was appointed Assistant Professor of History at the University of Missouri where he learned and taught for three decades. These notes necessarily acquire a personal tone at this point because, one year later, I began teaching Spanish American literature at the same institution and Walt became one of my closest friends and colleagues.

Quite possibly his first words to me are lost in the trivia of social formulae; but they would be few indeed, because Scholes was not one to spend much time on formality. The first words I remember were "What are you working on?" If I had any intention of relaxing for a few weeks, after the rigors of graduate school, my plans certainly changed on the spot. And I discovered, over the years, that Walt asked the question frequently, and always really wanted to know. He expected his colleagues and his students to be in the process of finding out something.

My own answer to the question, in 1946, pointed out our mutual interest in nineteenth-century Mexico. Scholes was working on the constitutional convention of 1856–1857. Soon after that he edited

an English translation of José Fernando Ramírez's *Mexico during the War with the United States*, published in 1950. His interest in the nineteenth century led to the study of Benito Juárez—first biographical, and later more comprehensive in its view of an epoch with Juárez at the center.

Scholes' analysis of the social structure and the individuals in it was deeply humane, yet relentlessly critical, whether dealing with history or reacting to his own time. This delicate balance made him a good literary critic too, though he never plied the trade. He was both literate and literary. Our mutual interests led to a very useful series of visits to each other's classes and to joint efforts with graduate students.

From 1953 to 1956, Scholes served as chairman of his department. Again our careers coincided when I was named chairman of my department shortly after the Scholes appointment. During our terms of office, I enjoyed, in a different context, his unselfish advice and companionship. The fifties were the period of his greatest activity in administrative service to the university. In this area, then and later, whether serving on the personnel committee of the college, or the press committee, or the research council, Scholes was the advocate of those who earnestly sought to learn and to teach.

Mexican Politics during the Juárez Regime was published in 1957. To some, the publication date may suggest that Scholes got back to scholarship after serving as chairman. The fact is, of course, that he never left it; much of the work for the new book was done while he was chairman. It became a paperback in 1969, and was published in Spanish in 1972.

Obviously, it would be impossible to study the Juárez period without becoming interested in foreign policy. The second turn in Scholes' career as scholar took place as an outgrowth of this study. The first published indication of his new concentration on diplomatic history was an article in the Franciscan magazine, *The Americas* (January, 1959), entitled "Sir Lionel Carden's Proposed Agreement on Central America in 1912." Soon after that, the name of Marie V. Scholes appears as coauthor of several articles—on "Great Britain, the United States and the Recognition of Obregón" and on "Wilson, Grey and Huerta," among other subjects. Marie Vielmetti Scholes, who survives her husband, was always his natural collaborator, reinforcing his compassionate criticism and dedication to learning.

The major work of this most recent stage of Scholes' career is *The Foreign Policies of the Taft Administration*, published in 1970.

Three years later, *Readings in 20th Century United States Foreign Policy* came out; and since it is meant primarily for class use, it combines with its more scholarly brother to emphasize once again the two important aspects of Walter V. Scholes' all too short career.