



## Documents and Minutes of the General Faculty

Report of the Special  
Johannes Lassen Boysen Memorial Resolution Committee  
5 June 1959

In memoriam

## Johannes Lassen Boysen

Johannes Lassen Boysen, the son of Hans Boysen and Mathilda Lassen, was born February 20, 1871, at Loit-Kirkeby, North Schleswig, now Danish Territory, formerly Prussian. He died in Austin, Texas, on January 20th, 1959. He graduated from the Volksschule of his birthplace in 1886 and in the same year emigrated to this country. Living with relatives, he attended Northwestern Preparatory School in Minneapolis. There, in 1895, evidently well-prepared, he entered Harvard College, winning the Detur Prize in History and graduating in 1898 magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa and with honorable mention in German and French, Taking courses with scholars like Grandgent, von Jagemann, Kuno Francke no doubt stimulated his interest in modern languages as a field of study -- as perhaps did also his early experience in his home land of the bitter antagonisms that a difference of language may arouse in peoples of the same race and religion, and the necessity of better understanding.

Wishing to stand on his own feet, the young man accepted a position as Teacher of Ancient and Modern Languages (and practically everything else except science) at the Protestant Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia. Apparently, the youngsters there were not too unruly to make life miserable for the gentle scholar, for he remained in the same position till 1902 when he became Instructor in German at Syracuse University. Thus reasonably assured of an academic career he sought out as lifemate his cousin, Catharina Boysen, with whom he lived in a happy marriage until her death in 1948. A daughter, Helen Ingeborg, survives him. [At the time of his death, Miss Boysen was a science teacher at Austin's McCallum High School.]

Continuing in his chosen line of German, he obtained the Master's Degree at Syracuse in 1904 and, on being granted leave, attended the University of Leipzig in 1907, then settled down to work in the University of Würzburg from 1907 to 1909, achieving the Ph.D. with a dissertation, directed by Brenner, *Über den Gebrauch des Genetivs in den Epen Wolframs von Eschenbach* (Leipzig, 1910). Sitting at the feet of giants of philology like Sievers, Mogk, Brugmann, and listening to lecturers like Witkowski and Köster must have been of decisive influence on the standards he set on his own studies.

Returning to his post at Syracuse he quickly advanced to a full professorship of Germanic Languages (1913), but was abruptly dismissed by Chancellor Day when he dared to oppose academic dictatorship in connection with the appointment of a man for a

position in his Department who in his judgment was not qualified for it. It would have been a strong case for the Association of American University Professors -- as yet non-existent -- to have demonstrated its salutary influence!

Nothing daunted, Boysen filled a temporary position as Instructor in German at State College, Pennsylvania; but was soon (1914) attracted to Austin, where, under the brilliant leadership of Eduard Prokosch, a promising Department of Germanic Languages and Comparative Philology was being built up. But again it was fated to be interrupted -- this time by the First World War, when through most egregious folly under the guise of patriotism, not only here but all over the country, departments teaching the language of our then enemy were being liquidated. Later, in the early twenties, when sanity was restored, Boysen, who had filled in meanwhile teaching French, was entrusted with the building up again of the Department of Germanic Languages. It fell to him chiefly to teach the advanced and graduate courses in the fields which he had made particularly his own, viz. Gothic, the history of the German language, advanced German grammar and syntax. Dr. Boysen never gave himself to frequent publication, but in 1917 he produced a carefully edited German version of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* in the Oxford German Series.

Boysen was a man of retiring disposition, shunning, whenever possible, administrative work; but he gave unstintingly of himself to such duties as were assigned to him in committees and to the chairmanship of the Department (1920-1929). [He retired from the faculty in 1951 with the title "Professor Emeritus of Germanic Languages."]

He was especially valuable in the guidance of graduate students, frequently serving on dissertation committees not only in German but also in the English and other departments. That he was not afraid to stand up for what he considered right was shown not only in his brush with Chancellor Day but also by his vigorous protest when a man judged by him to be ill-prepared was brought into the Department against the wishes of its members. In his classes Boysen insisted with gentle urgency on exact and thorough work. His standards were high. As a teacher, his quiet dignity, fairness, lack of all showmanship are gratefully remembered by thousands of students now scattered throughout the length and breadth of this country.

Charles Paul Boner  
Robert Adger Law  
Harry J. Leon  
Lee M. Hollander, Chairman

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Professor Boysen's legacy to the Department of Germanic Languages is varied, as the article below from *The Daily Texan* indicates.

His name is preserved in the title of an Undergraduate Scholarship endowment in the Department that continues to reward undergraduate students of high academic achievement.

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\*From *The Daily Texan*, Friday, 2 April 1954, Section II, Page 6  
-by Betty Bernard

## **Shacks Dotted Unpaved Streets When Dr. Boysen First Saw Campus**

Traveling is now replacing teaching for Dr. Johannes Lassen Boysen, 83-year-old retired professor of Germanic languages.

Since retiring in 1941, Dr. Boysen has visited all our well-known National Parks, including Crater Lake, which impressed him most.

"You don't have to go to Europe to find beautiful scenery," says Dr. Boysen, who was born in Loitkirkeby, Denmark, then under the control of Germany. He came to America with a distant relative, when he was 15 years old.

After he received a bachelor of arts degree from Harvard, a master of arts degree from Syracuse University, and a doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Würzburg, Germany. Dr. Boysen came to the University in 1914.

"I really feel like Texas is my home since I have lived here for 40 years," stated Dr. Boysen.

For the past ten years, Dr. Boysen has busied himself by keeping a record of the Texas weather reports, and catching up on his reading. Novels, historical works, and biographies interest him most, especially the biography of Abraham and Mrs. Lincoln. He doesn't plan to give up his linguistic study, but is trying to catch up on things he has always wanted to do. He is now becoming acquainted with the Far East, studying the characteristics of the people, their customs and languages.

Last June, Dr. Boysen went East to attend his fifty-fifth class reunion at Harvard. This summer he plans to go to California to visit his brother who is retiring from medicine.

Dr. Boysen saw Austin, as well as the University, grow from the setback of the Civil War to the present. "Twenty-fourth Street had just been paved, and beyond that was a dirt road," remarked Dr. Boysen. Because the mud was so deep in Austin, he found rubber galoshes a necessity, and remembered, "they had to be tied on."

The University campus was sparsely dotted with old shacks; Sutton Hall was under construction; the old Home Economics Building stood where the Architecture Building now stands; and the old Main Building was only one story.

"Most of the main offices were located in the old Main Building, which had a long hall running through it which we all called the English Channel," stated Dr. Boysen. The professor feels that the University is the "future of Texas." He further stated that, because of the University's foreign student program, "the students at the University are able to learn how to get along and understand the customs of people from all over the world. The Eastern schools do not have the foreign student enrollment like the University does."

Of his many experiences, Dr. Boysen recalls the tedious months he went through before entering Harvard. "French was required for entrance into Harvard," he stated, "and since I had only Latin at prep school, it was up to me to learn French on my own. With the help of a friend who knew the language, my background in Latin, and many long and tiring hours of study, I was finally able to pass the French exam."

Dr. Boysen still takes time out to go to his office in Batts Hall, to look things over. The new language building is quite a change over what he had for a language department in 1914. Then his classes met in different shacks each class period.

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