Gordon B. Dodds (1932-2003)

Gordon Barlow Dodds, professor of history at Portland State University (PSU), was a leading historian of the westward movement, the Pacific Northwest, and the state of Oregon. Born on March 12, 1932, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Dodds grew up in Pennsylvania, received an A.B. in 1954 from Harvard University, an M.A. in 1955 from the University of Illinois, and a Ph.D., from the University of Wisconsin in 1958. His first job was in the Department of History of Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, where he taught until 1966.

Dodds was chair of the PSU History Department from 1996 to 1999 and head of the department's Public History Program. He sat on the Council of the Pacific Coast branch of the American Historical Association and the editorial boards of *Arizona and the West, Pacific Historical Review, Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Western Historical Quarterly*, and the Oregon State University Press.

Dodds was instrumental in the election by the PSU faculty of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) as its collective bargaining agent in 1977. When AAUP's first president fell ill, Dodds became the union's leader. On his retirement, he was appointed university archivist, a position he filled until his death. In 1979, PSU bestowed on him the first Branford P. Millar Award for Faculty Excellence. He also won the PSU Alumni Association Distinguished Faculty Service Award for 1997-1998.

A prolific scholar, Dodds was the author, co-author, or editor of ten books, including *The Salmon King of Oregon* (1959), *Autobiography of a Pygmy Monopolist* (1961), and *Varieties of Hope: An Anthology of Oregon Prose* (1993). *The College that Would Not Die: The First Fifty Years of Portland State University* (2000), became the university's official history. His text, *The American Northwest: a History of Oregon and Washington* (1986), remains a standard reference and is used widely in public schools. His articles and reviews appeared in, among others, the *Journal of American History, Western Political Quarterly, American Historical Review, Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, and *Oregon Historical Quarterly*.

In *Oregon* (1977), a history of the state written at the appointment of the U.S. Bicentennial Commission, Dodds laid out his signature argument concerning Oregon's history—that the state's deeply ambivalent political culture of progressivism at the margins and conservatism at the core was the mainspring of its historical development. He elaborated this view in that work and others, but perhaps most succinctly in a speech, "The Burden of Oregon History," delivered at the Washington County Historical Society in 1986. In it he rang a variation on C. Vann Woodward's *The Burden of Southern History*, which defined the South in terms of its historical encumbrance of shame and guilt deriving from slavery, Civil War defeat, and occupation. In contrast, Oregon's political culture, Dodds said, was shaped by its successes—the crossing of the Oregon Trail, the so-called Oregon System (initiative, referendum, and recall), woman suffrage, and environmental legislation such as the bottle bill. But these triumphs, he maintained, had created not a striving and achieving society, but one that had become in the twentieth century increasingly self-satisfied and static. His warning to the state that he loved was "that a community's success is not…inevitable, that the past is not necessarily prologue, and that costly sacrifice, like eternal vigilance, is the price of liberty and progress."

Gordon Dodds died in Portland on August 29, 2003.

Written by Craig Wollner

Further Reading:

Dodds, Gordon B. *The Salmon King of Oregon:R. D. Hume and the Pacific Fisheries*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1959.

Hume, Robert Deniston. *A Pygmy Monopolist: The Life and Doings of R. D. Hume Written by Himself and Dedicated to His Neighbors.* Gordon B. Dodds, ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

Dodds, Gordon B., ed. *Varieties of Hope: An Anthology of Oregon Prose.* Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1993.

Dodds, Gordon B. *The College that would Not Die: The First Fifty Years of Portland State University.* Portland:

Oregon Historical Society Press, 2000.

Dodds, Gordon B. *The American Northwest: a History of Oregon and Washington.* Arlington Heights, Ill.: The Forum Press, Inc., 1986.

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