CHRISTOPHER WARD AS AN HISTORIAN

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It is an honor to be invited, and a very real pleasure to be able, to participate with you in the ceremonies connected with the dedication of the Christopher Ward Room. Reluctantly, I have to say that I am now an outsider in this community, and have to speak as one. Yet tonight I find it a congenial and appropriate role, because the erection of this useful memorial is a matter of no little interest outside Delaware. Had the Ward family chosen to endow a professorial chair at this university, or provide scholarships for students, or build a building or beautify the campus or do any of those several things which might have perpetuated Mr. Ward's name in other ways here, the occasion would have been gratifying, but would scarcely have touched that larger world of which the university is a part. That the family has chosen the most productive kind of a memorial makes the beginning of this enterprise a matter of concern to the whole American library community, the whole historical profession, and the critical fellowship generally. Representing for this evening that outside world of libraries, histories and criticism, my first duty is to comment upon the importance of the Ward Room to those of us who live and work beyond the lovely precincts of this campus.

I suppose the most appealing aspect of this memorial to any of us just now is the warmhearted feeling we have that an especial recognition is being given to one who, like ourselves, spent much of his energies and time in the reading and writing of books. To have a novelist, critic and historian so graciously and permanently celebrated, gives a dignity and a beauty to all our efforts, and persuades us that the quality of appreciation such work receives is worth our best devotion. Of inspiration of this sort there is all too little, and this room, with its intimacy and its beguiling asso-

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An address delivered at the opening of the Christopher Ward Room in the Memorial Library, May 6, 1947.
ciations, will be only less a joy to think about at a distance than it will be to live with.

Off the campus, however, the Ward Room will function not so much as a handsome place but more as a collection of books—a collection of books Mr. Ward owned and books he wrote. Now a moment ago I spoke of this occasion as "beginning an enterprise." Let us think of it as that, rather than as the fashioning of a static, inanimate thing; for by receiving the Ward library, the University of Delaware is committing itself to certain activities that will lead it on to a higher plane of distinction. The world outside will now expect a new kind of leadership from this collegiate community.

Mr. Ward was both historian and book-collector, and one of the most important things about him as an historian is that he was a book-collector. He knew his field, he knew the books in it, he collected with care and confidence. Bibliography, as the historian and book-collector knows it, is an exacting science. It demands the utmost accuracy and the keenest understanding. These are qualities Mr. Ward revealed in both the books he bought and the books he wrote.

Now I hope the donors, and all of you here, realize what happens to the books in a collection like this when they come to the University Library. These books are important books, in an important field of Americana. They are catalogued in the ordinary way, and in the ordinary way a card for each one is sent to a very busy place indeed called the Bibliographical Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Here is the Union Library Catalogue for this area, a very important aid to scholars, for if you want a rare or obscure book, all you have to do is to call the Union Library Catalogue by phone, and in less than two minutes you will be told in what library that book may be found. There are some extremely interesting volumes in the Ward collection, which will now come to be known to scholars in this area as being part of the University of Delaware.

In turn, the Union Library Catalogue sends its cards to the Library of Congress, where every book is registered by a separate division that great institution has created for the sole purpose of helping scholars locate books which are difficult to find. By a letter to Mr. George A. Schwegmann, Jr., at the Library of Congress, invariably answered at once, a scholar anywhere in the world can learn of the existence of these Ward books, title by title. I think
too few donors and friends of university libraries realize this simple fact, that when they give books to one university, they are making them at once available to the whole American world of scholarship, and to the world of libraries, because of these techniques librarians have worked out. The books themselves need never leave their own building, but photographic copies supplied at cost can travel throughout the republic of writers and readers.

Similarly, it is a “standard operating procedure” for Mr. W. D. Lewis, your librarian, now to list and describe this collection in a great reference work, used wherever serious scholarly projects are pursued, called Special Library Resources. This is a book which writers, graduate students, and directors of scholarly projects must constantly refer to. In it, the University of Delaware Memorial Library is already indexed under a number of heads, and three special collections are described: (1) the Carnegie Art Collection, (2) 1600 books of rare Delawareana, and (3) the George Handy Bates Samoan Papers. In the next edition it will be of general scholarly interest to have added to these entries, (4) the books and papers of Judge George Gray, (5) the George Alfred Townsend Collection, (6) the American Revolutionary books and maps and Western Americana, and the manuscripts of works of Christopher Ward.

I dwell on these points because I think one from the outside should explain that the Ward Collection is not being buried here; on the contrary, by being in a public institution, these books are just beginning their period of utmost usefulness, a usefulness which will be as great off the campus as on.

So far I have mentioned the kind of usefulness which will automatically come to the Ward Collection if nothing but the ordinary things are done. Now we outsiders are going to expect a bit more than ordinary things from this University. Let me speak in technical terms for a few minutes. Receiving this collection, the University is now in a posture to teach us all in this field. It is a great field. The American Revolution was not only a period of extraordinary intellectual achievement, when the men (and women, too) of the seaboard commonwealths studied the thoughts and feelings of the long, long past and applied them to their own situation—the American Revolution was more than that, it was the seminal period of the Age of Revolutions generally, in Europe and Latin America. It is a subject which has been much studied
and written about; and on which much work still must be done. Yet, strange though it be to say so, the bibliography of the American Revolution has never been written.

The literary history of the Revolution includes about nine or ten thousand books, pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers and magazines printed between 1763 and 1790; it includes perhaps the same number or more English and European books relating to America in that period. These literary remains are not only the principal sources of our information on the Revolution; in the largest sense, the texts of these books were the Revolution.

Now bibliography is the grammar of history. Without bibliographical knowledge, the historian is only groping. Yet the books of this great age still await critical bibliographical treatment. There are interesting and helpful aids: Charles Evans' *American Bibliography*, Joseph Sabin's *Dictionary of Books Relating to America*, Charles R. Hildeburn's *Issues of the Pennsylvania Press*, the *Church Catalogue* prepared by George Watson Cole, *Biblioteca Americana* of the John Carter Brown Library, and others. These include Revolutionary books, but they do not stress them; and except for the *Church Catalogue*, they give little but titles, sizes and numbers of pages. Since the Newberry Library's *Check List of American Revolutionary War Pamphlets* in their possession (prepared in 1922 by Ruth Lapham [Butler]), a short-titled list, there has been no attempt to make a comprehensive bibliography of the Revolution; nor can we find anywhere critical bibliographies of Tom Paine, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, John Dickinson, or any other writer, or important special topics such as, to choose not at random, "The Three Lower Counties on Delaware," "The Delaware State," and "The State of Delaware." The physical scientists could not pursue their work lacking so essential a tool; historians should do no less than they, if they intend to speak with as much authority.

Now these books are very important individually, and we are coming to need as careful and as full bibliographical descriptions of Revolutionary Americana as we have constructed of Incunabula.

The University of Delaware will be conferring a significant service upon professional study, if by providing adequate personnel and adequate funds it encourages its librarian, whose own field happily is Americana, to set in process a careful bibliography of all the Ward books, including title page, format measurements,
pagination, collation by signatures, type face, paper stocks, water marks, cancels, misprints, misspellings, catch-words, head titles, and literary collation. Every book of the Revolutionary period so described, with no pre-judgment of its individual significance, will get us further along the road toward an understanding of who printed what, when, where and how, and partly why. Particularly is this important in the books of the Delaware River area, which have been notably neglected, and in which the Ward Collection greatly enriches the University’s holdings.

As an outsider, I also express the hope that the presence of these books will lead the faculties in history and literature to teach this period with a closer attention to its books than is given in any college course in our time. And I suggest further that, with the impetus of this collection, the University might well consider inaugurating a new and much needed curriculum: an undergraduate major in bibliography, connected with the fields of history and literature, which would train competent people to take some of the many positions which cannot now be filled in rare book libraries and in general libraries with rare book collections. Here is an academic field in which this university could lead all others.

Before leaving the subject of the books in this collection, I am moved to express one final hope, which is perhaps the dream of everyone present here tonight, that the people of this state, and especially those who might form some such organization as the Friends of the University Library, will annually add to the holdings, now so generously augmented, in the Revolutionary period. With the careful expenditure of $3,000 a year for ten years, this library could become one of the leading libraries in the field of the middle colonies and states in this period, a position which would significantly support the University’s already distinguished place in American studies.

When I reached the campus this morning, the first thing I was told was of the gift to the library presented by Mrs. C. B. Evans in memory of President Raub. I congratulated the University on this significant gift, and on the interest in the Library which it reveals. It is very heartening to observe these great gifts coming into the Library. In these days, when a university’s capital expenditures are weighted so heavily toward furnishing equipment and support for scientific work, the historian and the literary scholar feel rather painfully the imbalance against them. The
Ward Room, and the support which I hope it will get, will be an encouragement to those on and off the campus who recognize that science and applied science do not establish our values, though they may destroy them; that the moral studies deserve an equivalent share of our educational expenditure.

As an outsider contemplates these potentialities in the Ward gift, he cannot but reflect what a long way this institution has come since those days, within memory, when Dr. Sypherd, on the road to his present eminence, taught courses in English, courses in history, courses in economics and sociology, and in what was loosely called his spare time served the University as librarian, as well. In his full years in this University the present has been ever richer than the past, and the future, with such acquisitions as this one, becomes still more abundant.

It may appear to you that I have said more about these books than is really called for by the title "Christopher Ward as an Historian." I did so on purpose, because an historian, particularly one who is a collector, cannot be better known than through the books he read. His collection brings us close to the man. So do his own histories. A man reveals himself in the books he writes. The old tag has it, "books once were men." A book is a human thing, dull and shoddy, or radiant and gay as the nature of its creator may have been. A man can write a trivial book, or an important one; he can write carefully or hastily, wisely or foolishly; but he cannot write without revealing himself.

Before finishing the draught of these remarks, I had the advantage of reading Professor Able's instructive address. Like Dr. Able, I had already concluded that it was remarkable that a busy lawyer should have studied so much and written so well; now that Dr. Able has described for us the parodies and novels and their development, I am all the more impressed with the uncommon energy of Christopher Ward, whose three substantial historical works any professional historian would have considered a full and creditable career in themselves. Lawyer, novelist, historian: here is a *cursus vitae* for which no present-day parallel in our region suggests itself.

Mr. Ward was an amateur historian; that is to say, he did not make his living by teaching and writing history. It was his hobby, his relaxation, and his enjoyment. This was in an honored tradition, a tradition which has produced some of our most important
works. There is nothing trivial about the amateur. George Fort
Milton, who is of the same tradition, once entitled an essay, "History
as a Major Sport," and on this campus, certainly, one does
not need to point out how serious and important a thing a major
sport is. To Mr. Ward, history as a sport came naturally; his
*The Dutch & Swedes on the Delaware 1609–1664* he dedicated to
his two grandfathers, Christopher L. Ward, President of the Brad-
ford County (Pa.) Historical Society, and Dr. Lewis P. Bush,
President of the Historical Society of Delaware.

Not only did he inherit historical interests; he lived among
people who constantly refreshed and enlarged his enjoyment of
reading and writing books about the past. He had the genial
annual fellowship of the Historical Society; Professor George H.
Ryden gave him many hours of "shop talk" (how Professor Ryden
would have relished this evening’s occasion!); his contemporaries
and friends in the notable "Delaware School" of illustrators
added to the fun of making books by contributing their drawings;
the Curtis Paper Company was a local concern whose fine paper
was famous all over the country, and the Press of Kells was doing
printing of great distinction; without leaving New Castle County,
Christopher Ward could find all the essential human values and
professional skills that made his hobby a delight.

Probably, Christopher Ward became an historian because he
loved New Castle County and the state of Delaware. As Professor
Able has told you, the novels came first, the histories afterwards;
and history was to Mr. Ward’s creative talents the greater chal-
lenge and the higher calling. But the local affections were always
there, ready to be developed as the riddle of the past presented
more dimensions to him.

Kipling has written,

> God gives all men all earth to love,
> But since man’s heart is small,
> Ordains for each one spot shall prove
> Beloved over all.

For Christopher Ward, that ordained spot was this Wilmington
community. His own family and his wife’s had lived here for
generations, and except for the youthful indiscretion of going else-
where to college, his whole life was spent in these counties. Of
course I cannot say for certain, but I rather imagine he got as
much satisfaction from his work as chairman of the commission to celebrate the Tercentenary Anniversary of Swedish settlement on the Delaware as from anything else he ever did. He began this work in 1931, and it reached its climax in the years 1935–1938. He had already published *The Dutch & Swedes on the Delaware*, on the occasion of the tercentenary celebration of the Dutch settlement at Lewes; now in the years of the Swedish celebration (while writing two of his novels) he made a cutting from the larger book which he called *New Sweden on the Delaware*. He also prepared the wholly delightful little volume, which will appear quaint only to those who do not know *Poor Richard*, called *Delaware Tercentenary Almanack & Historical Repository 1938*. It was designed by Richard T. Ware and printed here in Newark at the Press of Kells, on Curtis paper, bound in cloth made by the Bancroft Company, with illustrations by (among others) Frank Schoonover, Andrew Wyeth and N. C. Wyeth. It is a book with a real Delaware flavor to it, and I hope it is known to you all.

These tercentenary celebrations, together with the 150th anniversary of the Constitution in 1937, turned Mr. Ward’s literary interests almost exclusively to history. He had learned much; among other things, he had learned what local and regional historians always find out, namely, how little is told by written histories of the real past of any people. While this University was honoring him with the degree of Doctor of Letters, and the Swedish government was decorating him, he was already hard at work on the largest enterprise he had yet undertaken: *The Delaware Continentals*, which the Historical Society published in 1941.

This book started out to be a regimental history of the only militia organization that served throughout the whole Revolutionary war, from Bunker Hill in 1775 to Yorktown in 1781. Sources were obscure and fragmentary; a great deal of digging was required. Mr. Ward worked very hard. He discovered a great deal, and handled his material with impeccable judgment. Technically, it was a very difficult book to write, but he succeeded in making it both sound and entertaining. It was received very well indeed, not least because of a careful and helpful appendix explaining controverted points.

Mr. Ward had not got very far into *The Delaware Continentals* before he realized that his readers would be severely handicapped by the lack of a military history of the Revolution. He could not
tell the story of the Delaware Regiment in the south, for example, without analyzing the whole picture of Greene's Southern Campaign. It was an almost impossible task, to write a general and a regimental history in the same volume. Broadening the frame of his research, Mr. Ward finished the book in hand by as clear a combination of the big and little pictures as he could make; then even before The Delaware Continentals was printed he began the composition of the larger history which he had come to realize was necessary.

The War of the Revolution has not yet been published, though the writing was finished about three weeks before Mr. Ward's sudden death, and plans are under way to ensure its appearance. It will be the most important of Mr. Ward's books; it gives us our first comprehensive military history of the Revolutionary War in the convenient compass of a single work.

I have had an opportunity to study the manuscript of this work with some care, and have been again struck with the efficiency and productivity of the author. In this project Mr. Ward did much more than expand his previous book; he shifted his point of view to a continental scope, and approached his subject from the over-all problems of strategy which confronted both British and American armies.

The hardest problem he faced was that of organization. To describe eight years of war on a 2,000 mile front, holding the reader's interest and showing the proper interrelationships of widely separated events, required the most careful planning and continuous application. Mr. Ward knew exactly what he wanted to do. This was not to be a history of the Revolution, but rather a history of the war which that revolution caused. He was not concerned with any event which did not bear directly upon the meeting of the two armies on the land. With fast-moving narrative, with coherence and skill, he wrote of the War in the North, the War in the South, and the War on the Border. He described the overview—the strategy and logistics of whole campaigns; and with this overview in mind he described battles, sieges, marches, engagements, encampments and skirmishes, in great detail. Each major figure in his story was portrayed, when he first appeared, in a few paragraphs of some of the best characterization Ward ever achieved, and the human side of the war was treated with sympathy and sensitivity.
No one but an historical scholar can fully appreciate the magnitude of this achievement. To write the story of the Revolutionary War, Mr. Ward had to inspect and digest printed sources amounting to thousands of titles. Certain details required additional research in manuscripts, and the cartographical problems were immense. Furthermore, so much was legend, and so little fact, that his law-trained instincts for evaluating evidence had to be always on the alert.

Those of you who knew Mr. Ward may have been aware of the intensity and rapidity with which he worked. His economical methods are apparent from this manuscript. Having organized his material into chapters, 84 of them, the whole making 350,000 words, he marshalled the sources for each chapter, weighed them, criticized them, and evaluated each. He exploded many myths and discovered much new material.

He could not have done this job, between his seventy-first and seventy-fifth year, without the encouragement of many friends. I do not know who they were, though I know that Charles McLean Andrews, Kenneth Roberts and Alan French were among them. But apart from their encouragement, Mr. Ward was dependent upon no one. He did his own research, and made his own judgments. Having come into history through local historical work, rather than through teaching or journalism, he had the freshness of approach, and the sense of realism, which such background gives.

Indeed, Ward was rather unusual among historians of the 20's and 30's. It was a period when history was being written by two groups from two different motives. There were the professional scholars, building that great library of technical monographs which is so admirable, so impressive, and withal so unappreciated an achievement of American studies in the period; and there were the popular debunkers who wrote as though the aim and purpose of historical study were to shock or to disillusion. Ward was neither of these. He wrote for a wide audience, but with the highest professional standards, and with the most honest motives. His judgment was colored by no dominating biases; he rejected extremes, and wrote with sturdy common sense.

Much more could be said of Christopher Ward's achievements as an historian, but we have other things to do this evening, and I must not detain you over long. The manuscripts of The Delaware Continentals and The War of the Revolution will be in the Me-
morial Library for the study and enjoyment of those who come after. Let us hope that, by showing how one man constructed his books, they will help others to construct theirs, and seen in the framework of a busy man’s whole literary career, they will persuade each student who sees them that he can do a little more and a little better than he thought.

For there is much to do. The whole truth, the whole usefulness of American history still eludes us; we are as yet scarcely across the threshold of understanding. The projects still to be pursued, and the general works yet to be written, are destined to be more significant by far than anything that has been done in the past. The Christopher Ward Room stands less as a revelation of yesterday’s historians than as an example for tomorrow’s. To have such an example in the University’s premises is entirely fitting. The purposes of a University are three-fold: to preserve knowledge, to enlarge knowledge, to impart knowledge. All the pressures of a day militate against the first two in favor of the third; yet teaching is the least important of the University’s functions. The Ward Room, properly appreciated and properly used, will serve as a continual reminder of the higher duties this community owes to the preservation and the enlargement of knowledge. To this end, let us hope that the enterprise now launched will be constantly directed.