

Allan Loraine Carter, Ph.D.

A Bostonian on the Plains



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In the spring of 1927, the newly established Texas Technological College was saddened by the sudden death of Professor Richard C. Harrison, head of the English Department. In July, Tech President Paul Horn, Ph.D., hired Allan Loraine Carter, Ph.D., as his successor.

Carter seemed an excellent choice. Born in Everett, Mass., in 1890 and receiving a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, he was then an associate professor of English at Penn State.

Described as a gentleman of culture and dignity, a dedicated scholar and a fluent and brilliant lecturer, his classes were uniformly successful and popular. Carter also would be the first and only Ph.D. of English at the time.

President Horn expressed some misgivings concerning Carter's ability to adapt to living in a remote conservative southwestern city of only 15,000. After all, this Bostonian had spent a year studying in Copenhagen, Denmark, as well as six months in Oxford, England.

But there was little to worry about. Arriving in Lubbock in August 1927 via steamship to Galveston and train the rest of the way, Carter plunged into setting his goal of "making my department as fine as any in the State."

He encouraged his staff to publish and to further their education by earning their own doctoral degrees. Initiating a conference series, he invited guest lecturers from major universities.

Fluent in French and German with knowledge of Danish, Carter was an expert in Shakespeare, Chaucer, early English, Scandinavian and German literature. Still, President Horn strongly believed that freshman English was the most important subject taught and insisted that every English professor should teach at least one section.

Throughout his career, Carter not only complied with this, but he would often teach two freshman classes instead of one, along with upper division classes, not to mention his administrative responsibilities as department head. However high-minded he was, there was also the very practical matter of dealing with the reality of Tech's explosive early growth. Tech's enrollment in 1927 was just over 1,500 students, for which Carter had a staff of 14. By 1938, some 3,500 students were admitted. If the English Department had kept pace, he would have had a faculty of 33, not 24.

Noting that the local movie theatres featured shows of at best mediocre qual-

ity, he began to screen high-quality travel films as well as adaptations of the works of Shakespeare in his home to his students. In a time when many Texans had not even been outside their own state, in 1939 Carter sponsored a tour of England, visiting such literary and historic places as Oxford and Stratford. The trip had its moments, especially when all his students left for Switzerland and France without his knowledge or permission only days before the German invasion of Poland and the start of World War II. To complicate matters, they were bumped from the ship they were to return home on and had to scramble to get another.

Sadly, Carter soon after this trip died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 49. His widow, Olga M. Carter, furthered her husband's legacy by becoming an instructor in the English department for 21 years, retiring in 1960. Not only did she donate the bulk of her husband's extensive library, but their three children, William (B.S. Geology, 1943); Maizie (B.A. French, 1947) and Giles (B.S. Chemistry, 1949), were Tech graduates.

And since 1982, the Allan L. Carter and Olga Meloy Carter Memorial Scholarship has been given annually to an outstanding English student. ■