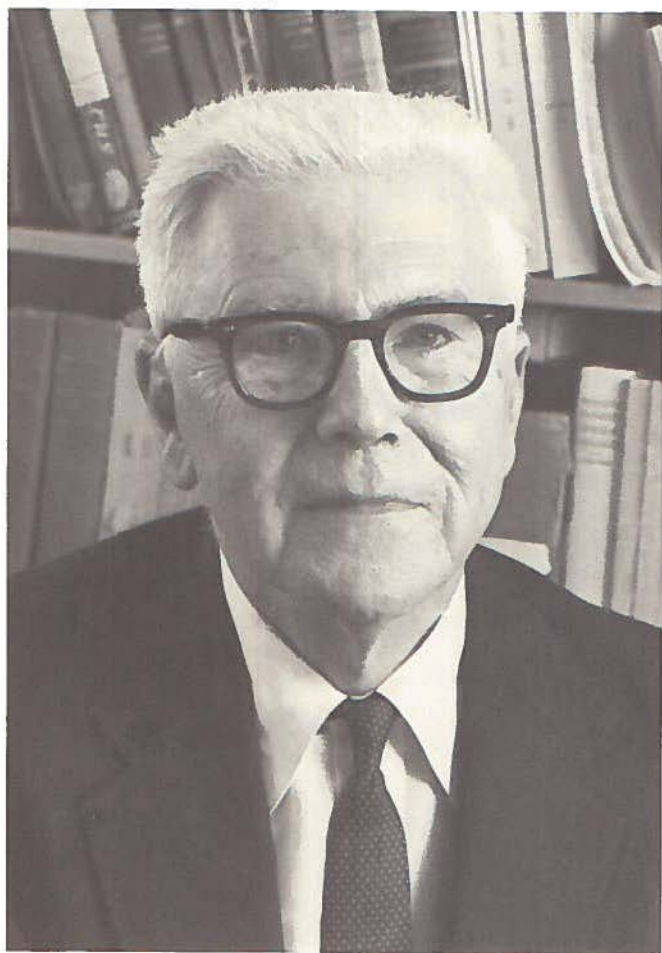


Arthur S. Link

President

American
Historical
Association

1981



For more than a quarter of a century Arthur Stanley Link, editor of The Papers of Woodrow Wilson and George Henry Davis '86 Professor of American History at Princeton University, has been recognized as the world's preeminent Wilson scholar. For a decade or longer he also has been acclaimed as the dean of the editors of political documents. In 1957, and again in 1961, volumes in his extended biography of the twenty-sixth President won the Bancroft Prize. This spring he joined C. Vann Woodward and John Hope Franklin as the only historians to be president of the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Southern Historical Association.

A man of strong convictions and imposing public presence, Professor Link is esteemed by intimates for his warmth, generosity, and loyalty. He was born on August 8, 1920 in New Market, Virginia, where his father was pastor of a Lutheran church. Educated in the public schools of North Carolina, he was graduated as a Phi Beta Kappa from the University of North Carolina in 1941. He then entered the graduate history program of that institution and studied with Fletcher M. Green, who directed his dissertation, and Howard K. Beale among others. Within four years he had earned the doctorate. Meanwhile he served as an instructor at North Carolina State and at Chapel Hill and spent nine months as a Rosenwald Fellow in Henry Steele Commager's seminar at Columbia University before joining the Princeton faculty in 1945. By 1947, the year the first volume of his biography of Wilson appeared under the title, Woodrow Wilson: The Road to the White House, he had published eight articles, including one in the journal of this association. Two years later he became associate professor at Northwestern University.

Two full-length studies and a volume of essays in the 1950s firmly established Link's reputation as the Wilson scholar. Each was grounded on mastery of archival sources, and two were enriched by discriminating use of newspaper and periodical literature. All were forceful in expression but judicious in interpretation.

Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era (1954), a volume in the New American Nation Series, analyzed Wilson's metamorphosis from a states rights' progressive to a New Nationalist interventionist in the tradition, if hardly the manner, of Theodore Roosevelt. It attributed Wilson's change more to political exigencies than to intellectual conversion, and it sharply criticized aspects of his Latin American policy. Yet it was highly appreciative of Wilson's commanding moral and political leadership.

Wilson: The New Freedom (1956), the magisterial second volume of Professor Link's continuing biography, described in close detail the great legislative achievements of Wilson's first two years in the White House, as well as the President's early entanglement with Mexico. It was further distinguished by its probing analysis of both the strengths and limitations of the New Freedom. The same year that this work appeared, the Albert Shaw Lectures on Diplomatic History at The Johns Hopkins University gave Link occasion to carry Wilson through the Peace Conference. Published the following year as Wilson the Diplomatist, the lectures portrayed a figure at once more noble and more realistic than the one who had emerged from Link's earlier works, especially The Road to the White House. They showed, in particular, how the President's commitment to a reordered post-war world constrained him to reject proposals that the United States

restrict its involvement in World War I to naval action. No less important, they adjudged his record at Paris to be more largely one of achievement than of failure. The sympathy for Wilson so progressively evident in these books marked no diminution of Link's critical powers; he continued to be objective in presentation and measured in judgment. But it did affirm, in the words of Ernest May, the "truth in the vinegared adage, tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner."

Neither Woodrow Wilson nor the classroom fully consumed Link's energies during this extraordinarily productive decade. In 1952 he and Richard W. Leopold edited Problems in American History, a pioneering work in its genre. Five years later he published the first of a half-dozen textbooks, American Epoch: A History of the United States since the 1890s. Regarded from the beginning as a classic political account of twentieth-century America, that work is now in its fifth edition. As its broad coverage indicated, Link's intellectual interests encompassed far more than the life of Woodrow Wilson. To the surprise of none of his students, he closed the decade with the publication of a path-breaking and widely reprinted article, "What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920s?"

In 1958, while serving as the Harmsworth Professor at Oxford, Link accepted the editorship of The Papers of Woodrow Wilson and returned to Princeton in 1960. He realized that his new duties would make completion of the biography problematic, but he concluded that The Papers would be the more enduring contribution to scholarship. Characteristically, however, he resolved to finish that part of the biography for which he had already done the research. From 1960 to 1965 three additional volumes brought its first phase to completion.

The last of these, Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace (1965), carried Wilson through the declaration of war in April 1917. Together, the four volumes on Wilson's first term constitute an unmatched account of a single presidential administration.

Even as Link worked on the biography, he organized a talented editorial staff for The Papers and supervised an exhaustive search for Wilson materials. The first volume of The Papers appeared in 1966 and additional volumes have followed at the rate of about three a year. At this writing forty-seven have been published, with some twenty more projected. Comprehensive in scope and meticulous in detail, they are superbly informative on every aspect of American life that Wilson touched. Patently, they have magnificently fulfilled the promise, as phrased by Dewey W. Grantham in his review of the first volume, to be "one of the great scholarly achievements of this generation."

Professor Link's monumental achievements as author and editor have brought him appropriate recognition and responsibilities. In addition to delivering the Shaw Lectures and serving as Harmsworth Professor, he twice has been a member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. He was a main organizer and the first president of the Association for Documentary Editing, and he has served on the editorial boards of the Journal of Southern History and the Journal of American History. He also has been a Guggenheim Fellow, a Rockefeller Fellow, and the Commonwealth Fund Lecturer at the University of London. He is presently a member of the American Philosophical Society, a corresponding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, a fellow of the Society of American Historians and the

American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and an honorary fellow of Jagiellonian University of Cracow. Seven colleges or universities, including his alma mater and Northwestern University, have awarded him honorary degrees.

For thirty-nine years Link has been married to the former Margaret McDowell Douglas. A native North Carolinian, she has made their home in Princeton a center of gracious hospitality for Wilson scholars from the East to West Coasts and from London to Tokyo. She and Professor Link are the parents of three sons and a daughter.

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