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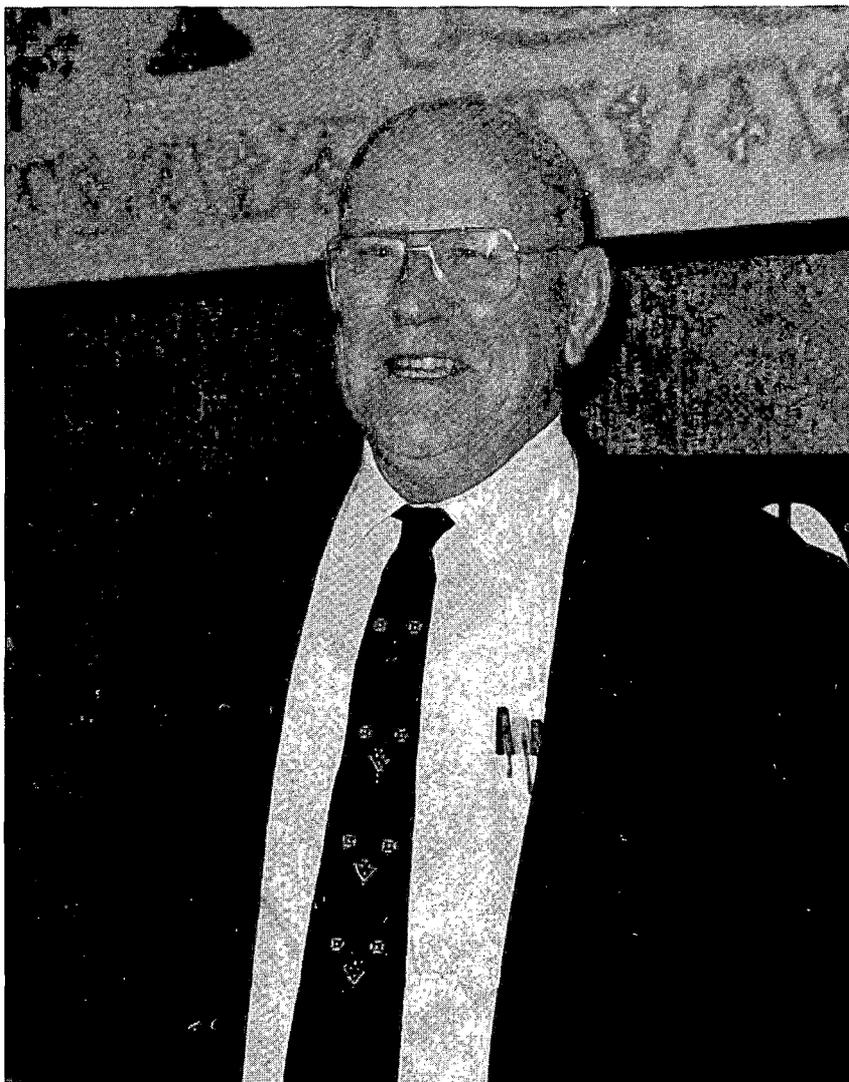
In Passing: Warren Albert Beck, 1919–1991

B. CARMON HARDY

Warren Albert Beck was raised and educated in the Midwest. From an early age he made his own way, working at jobs ranging from selling magazine subscriptions to machine shop supervision during World War II. Early on, his phenomenal memory and abilities as a rapid reader became evident. After completing the B.A. degree (with distinction) at Wayne University in 1947, he spent time teaching high school at Roseville, Michigan. Then followed an M.A. degree, again from Wayne, employment at Augustana College and Capital University, completion of the Ph.D. degree at Ohio State University in 1954, and a teaching appointment at Eastern New Mexico University, in Portales, in 1955. He left Portales in 1958 for California, serving as chairman of the social sciences division at Santa Ana College until 1961, and since that time, as professor of history in California State University, Fullerton.

Beck was a formidable producer, authoring ten books and over fifty articles and reviews. It seemed to make little difference whether his private burdens were large or small, whether he was involved in administration or not, his work product remained remarkably even. His publications included three historical atlases (coauthored with Ynez Haase), two literary anthologies, a history of California (with David

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Warren Albert Beck, 1919–1991. Photo courtesy of Kathy Frazee, taken in 1988.

A. Williams), and his *History of New Mexico* (1962), now in its thirteenth printing. Always looking ahead to new projects, Beck was, at the time of his death, well advanced on a study of recreation among American military forces on the frontier and had completed a monograph on the history of Christmas.

Beck's work in the classroom and with students was as celebrated

as his publications. He seemed to have taught everything: European history, American history, Latin American history, California history—twenty-nine different courses in all, at Cal State Fullerton alone. He founded and advised our department's chapter of Phi Alpha Theta and coached the first baseball team fielded by our university. In recent years, his film courses on World War I and World War II were among the most popular and sought for by students on campus. No one was surprised that the school awarded him the Outstanding Professor Award in 1989. It is also telling that no honor pleased him more.

Beyond the impressive record of his publications, the array of courses he taught, and the splendid stoicism of years spent in department and university meetings, Beck will be remembered for the conscious formality he brought to his work. While quite able (because of his impressive memory) to recall humorous parallels whenever difficult circumstances were at hand, he was, at the same time, very serious about the profession and what he considered its obligations. If his colleagues sometimes found his manner stern and his views conservative, they never doubted his devotion to our guild. Always uncomfortable with "discussion" as a pedagogical tool, he was a formalist in and out of the classroom. In those yeasty days of the 1960s, when so much tradition was called into question, and universities overflowed with mutineers committed to reforming the old order, Beck was unyielding. Despite the increasing appearance of beards, beads, and unbuttoned shirts behind the lectern, Beck continued, undeterred, with his habit of suits and ties. He wanted no misunderstanding about the importance he attached to what he was doing. It remained his way to the end: a simple affirmation of the man's personal, vocational creed.

Last of all, those who knew Beck will remember the readiness with which he gave assistance to others and his willingness to assume the added weight of new classes and unexpected assignments. Historians and students of three generations profited from his critiques of their writing, his urgings to move on when discouraged, his countless letters and phone calls in behalf of budding careers, the instruction of his papers, books, and commentaries generally. Many of us will long remember the coaching he provided when, as beginners in the profession, we needed shepherding through the thicket of egos that accumulate at professional meetings, the soothing he gave after difficult critiques, and the courage he instilled to move on and try again. More than specific recommendations, it was the generosity of his intent, his care and interest, that mattered.

I suspect that, with all of us, the personal style, the character of our mentors and friends, is what teaches most. During the last two

years, despite his illness with cancer, Beck continued to research, to write, and, when possible, to teach. There was never the slightest tincture of self-pity. He took every opportunity to visit with colleagues, to discuss his research, to help students. He was making preparations for an autumn offering of his ever-popular course on World War I when, on August 17, 1991, he passed away.

For those who knew him, Warren Beck the man, more than Warren Beck the historian, will remain his most lasting gift.