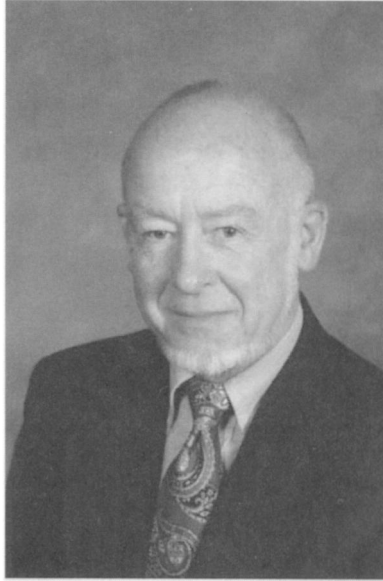


## IN MEMORIAM



*Norman O. Forness, 1936–2009*

*N*orman Olaf Forness, Associate Professor of History, Emeritus at Gettysburg College and a long-time member of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, died on April 2 after a brief illness. He was seventy-three years old.

The son of Norwegian immigrants, Norman was born in Minot, North Dakota on January 5, 1936, and moved with his family to Washington state during World War II. Norwegian culture was a significant part of Norman's early socialization, much as westward migration would shape his outlook as

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a teacher. Bilingual as a youth, Norman gradually lost his facility in the language of his ancestors. Yet on visits to Norway decades later Norman recaptured his Norwegian, or at least the dialect spoken in villages that his family had called home. Keeping up with family scattered through Norway and the United States remained important to Norman throughout his life.

Norman was educated at local schools near Tacoma before attending college at Pacific Lutheran University, where he majored in philosophy but found himself increasingly attracted to historical studies. After earning an M.A. in History at Washington State University, Norman made the fateful decision to move east, studying at Pennsylvania State University. In State College Norman was in his element. He embraced the academic challenge there, made lifelong friends, enjoyed his experience as a teaching assistant, and earned his Ph.D. under the tutelage of Philip Shriver Klein. His dissertation, on the early history of the Department of the Interior, was never published, though it continues to be cited in others' work. The dissertation served as the basis for several scholarly articles, including essays in *Prologue* (focused on a master, a slave, and patent law) and *The Historian* (on the Seward-Fillmore feud and the U.S. Patent Office).

Norman was appointed a Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Gettysburg College in 1964 and remained there throughout his academic career. From 1966–1968 he served as assistant dean of the college, then shifted to a tenure track appointment in history. His first love was American social and cultural history, a course he taught for more than thirty years. During his years at Gettysburg Norman initiated courses in urban history, African-American History, architectural history and the history of the American West, among others. His courses highlighted the interplay between American ideals and American realities.

As he would readily concede Norman's energies were devoted less to scholarship than to his teaching and committee responsibilities at Gettysburg College. A skillful copy editor, Norman employed this talent to good effect as Associate Editor of *The Historian's Lincoln: Pseudohistory, Psychobistory, and History* (University of Illinois Press, 1988) and for five years (1988–1993) as Associate Editor of *Pennsylvania History*. His major scholarly endeavor in the final two decades of his career was the study of two architects who contributed to the built environment of Central Pennsylvania: John Dempwolf of York and Stephen Button of Philadelphia. Norman's architectural acumen was impressive and it is regrettable he did not bring his work on these noteworthy figures to fruition. His expertise showed off best in the

classroom, as well as in his service for two decades on Gettysburg's Historic Architecture Review Board. Norman's interest in landscape design materially benefited Gettysburg College, and enriched innumerable conversations with his many friends.

Norman was quick to laugh at life's absurdities, but at the same time intensely committed to social justice and in particular racial equality. In some respects his life represented tensions between ideal and reality that he explored on a larger scale in his teaching. His students and many friends will forever remember him as someone whose passion for accuracy and encyclopedic memory were extraordinary, but also as someone who never took himself too seriously.

MICHAEL J. BIRKNER  
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