ROBERT D. CHRISTIE
1885-1974

A Remembrance

C. V. STARRETT

After a long and painful illness Bob Christie died on August 13, 1974, six months before his ninetieth birthday.

Both Pittsburgh papers carried the following obituary, with his picture:

Services for Robert D. Christie, director emeritus of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, will be at 11 a.m. tomorrow at Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Westminster Place, Shadyside.

Mr. Christie, 89, of Shadyside, died Tuesday at Negley House.

A native of Kentucky, he lived for 74 years on Ridge Avenue in Old Allegheny, now the city's North Side.

Mr. Christie was a graduate of Shady Side Academy and Princeton University and served as a captain in the 314th Infantry, 79th Division of the American Expeditionary Force, during World War I.

As a young advertising employee, Mr. Christie worked on a history of the law firm of Knox & Reed, attorneys for Pittsburgh's leading citizens during the nation's industrial revolution.

The assignment sparked his interest in history and eventually led to the directorship of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, a position Mr. Christie held for 16 years.

Regarded as an authority on many phases of the city's early history, Mr. Christie was a sought-after lecturer for district schools, church groups, and civic and service clubs.

Surviving is his widow, Rachel Alexander Christie.

Clippings of the notices reached me by air mail while I was out of the country, starting a chain of recollections of Bob's many years at the Society. The memories of him that come most readily to mind are of his forceful, sometimes pungent, talks to visiting groups, and to Members who enjoyed his carefully planned historical tours by auto-
mobile, bus, and river boat. Those who were present have not forgotten the night he was the speaker at one of our monthly public meetings. He made his lecture an informal report on the State of the Society, with full details concerning the, then, recent flood in the basement of our building — when the staff, including the director, took mops and buckets, and, in bare feet, disposed of several inches of water that covered the entire lower floor.

Bob Christie's brief annual history talks to the County Commissioners and their staff were welcome interludes in the long budget hearings in the Gold Room. When the Society's request had been stated, one or another of the Commissioners would always ask, "And now, Mr. Christie, do you have another little history lesson for us today?" Whereupon Mr. Christie would recount, in his saltiest fashion, some outstanding item in the chronicles of the city or the region. His brief tales of those colorful events always brought broad smiles to the faces of his listeners, and won their interest as well as a modest grant to the Society from the Commissioners.

Mr. Christie's years as Director of the Society were, he said, the best of his whole life, probably better even than his Princeton years and his service as a captain in the Army.

After he became Director Emeritus, he still continued to come to his desk every day to try to clear out the accumulation of the years — always hoping to pick up a group of visitors for a tour of the building.

As time went on, his sight and hearing failed, and the end came when, while watering his lawn, he broke a hip and entered on a terminal period of pain and weakness. And so, he came to the end of his long life.

We were saddened, of course; and yet we can smile at the thought that perhaps things have now perked up mightily, up there somewhere — wherever it is that kindly old gentlemen, especially war veterans, Princeton alumni, and antiquarians, foregather to exchange reminiscences of their earthly adventures.