



JAMES C. MALIN —IN MEMORIAM

BURTON J. WILLIAMS

PROF. James C. Malin was born in Edgley, N. D., on February 8, 1893, and passed away on January 26, 1979, in Lawrence. His undergraduate education was pursued at Baker University in Baldwin City where he received the B.A. degree in 1914. He enrolled in the graduate program of the University of Kansas receiving the M.A. degree in 1916 and the Ph.D. degree in 1921.

Upon the completion of his doctorate Professor Malin was appointed to the faculty of the University of Kansas as an assistant professor of history. He was promoted to associate professor in 1927 and to professor in 1938, retiring as emeritus professor of history from the University of Kansas in 1963. He was a fellow of the American Association for the Ad-

vancement of Science; and held memberships in the American Historical Association and the Agricultural Historical Society. He was elected president of the latter society in 1943. In addition he was a member of the Western History Association (honorary life membership), the American Association of Geographers, and the American Studies Association. Professor Malin was a long-time member of the Kansas State Historical Society, serving on the board of directors for 50 years. He was president of the Society in 1941 and for many years served as associate editor of the *Kansas Historical Quarterly*. He was also a frequent contributor to that magazine.

Professor Malin was without doubt one of the more prolific and provocative historians of this or any age, having written some 114 books and articles as well as scores of book reviews. Among his better known works the following books made a significant impact on American historiography: *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six*, *The Nebraska Question, 1852-1854*;

Title-page photo: James C. Malin (1893-1979), long-time professor of history at the University of Kansas and for many years associate editor of *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, died January 29, 1979, in Lawrence. Dr. Malin had been a member of the Society's board of directors since 1929 and served as its president in 1941. In his article, Burton J. Williams, a student of Dr. Malin's, comments on his contribution as a historian and as a person, noting "a remarkable man has passed our way."

The Contriving Brain and the Skillful Hand in the United States; Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas: A Study in Adaptation to Sub-humid Geographical Environment; Essays on Historiography; The Grassland of North America: Prolegomena to Its History; Confounded Rot About Napoleon; Grassland Historical Studies: Natural Resources Utilization in a Background of Science and Technology; On the Nature of History: Essays About History and Dissidence; A Concern About Humanity: Notes on Reform, 1872-1912; Iron-quill-Paint Creek Essays; and Doctors, Devils and the Woman. Scheduled for posthumous publication is Professor Malin's last book entitled, *Power and Change*.

In addition to his distinguished legacy of published works there remain hundreds of his students whose lives he indelibly impressed. In all some 97 students wrote their master's theses under Professor Malin's guidance, while seven students wrote their doctoral dissertations under his direction. Among those who style themselves "one of Malin's students," are many who never actually sat in one of his classes. Included among his students, in or out of class, is the distinguished historian Lee Benson who in a letter to this author dated September 30, 1971, stated, ". . . I was very much influenced by his [Malin's] ideas. . . ." Another distinguished historian, Alan Bogue, who as a student served as Professor Malin's research assistant spoke of ". . . the implications of developments in ecology which Professor Malin introduced me to in 1949. . . ." Truly Professor Malin was well aware of ecological and environmental implications long before the terms became common catch-words. But the late Prof. George L. Anderson's favorite phrase regarding his mentor, Professor Malin, adds a touch of the human as well as the intellectual dimension of the man, for he was fond of saying that, "Malin has forgotten more history than most folk could ever learn and he still knows more history than we do."

Unfortunately, many historians remain unaware of the significance of Professor Malin's historical studies. To put it another way the full impact of his contributions to the field of history has not been adequately recognized. And more often than not, his contributions have not been fully understood. Malin was

intensely, but studiously, concerned with the problem of certainty. How do we know what really happened and what were the principal forces at work which were antecedent to the "happening" itself. Since Malin firmly believed that history was unique, the problem of certainty became for him a growing challenge. For being unique, history unlike the "sciences," could not be repeated and thus no repetition of historical "experiments" was possible. For Malin, history was not only unique it was dynamic. To paraphrase several dictionary explanations, dynamics is the science of principles or forces acting in any field, physical or moral. To Malin these forces are continuously active and virtually inexhaustible; consequently history was never "finished." Moreover Malin was insistent that history must never be confused with contemporary thought imposed upon the past. As Malin once put it, "the study of history is intellectual enterprise which deals with change, or sequential relations of unique situations in space and time." History for him then could never be viewed as static or "finished," nor could it be made "functional" or "usable" as the current school of subjective-relativists so adroitly proclaim. To put it in Malin's words, "at best, any historical work is only a progress report on the enlargement of knowledge." Certainly Professor Malin's many contributions to the field of history made enormous progress in adding to our storehouse of knowledge.

In spite of the heavy workload of teaching, his continuous research efforts and writing, Malin gave unselfishly of his time, energy, and knowledge to his students as well as to colleagues across the country. His interest was in scholarly work which precluded his participation in the "academic politics of the historical profession." He was willing and eager to assist in the historical studies of young historians, even though they might not be his own students. And this tells us something not only of Malin the historian, it tells us something of Malin the person. He was a gentle, peaceful man who, like the title of one of his books, had an unwavering concern about humanity. However, he never lost sight of the individual person as being absolutely unique.

In a sense Malin did more than any other historian to give expression to the fact that the

fabric of history was composed of the particular and for Malin Kansas was often that particular. For him it was a microcosm of developments on a larger scale. As he has put it, "history must be learned and understood from the bottom up, not from the top down." This view alone made him something of an iconoclast. And because of a sometimes caustic pen his work often alienated him from the "in crowd" of the historical profession. And the "in crowd" all too often were captives of "the frame of reference" ideology of the hour which Malin scornfully rejected as "subjective-relativism."

If Malin had one continuing fear it was not that our resources would be exhausted, or that we would smother in the population explosion, his fear was "that man will fail himself." As Malin had put it, "history was never finished,"

and this suggests infinity. In this view of thinking mankind would never be a "finished" or vanished species so long as he had vision to see and to use the infinite resources of his own contriving brain and skillful hand.

Truly Malin's work is not finished. It is but a beginning. His work is a storehouse bursting with inexhaustible historical treasures. Almost 30 years ago Thomas LeDuc in concluding an article on Malin asked a haunting question: "One wonders how long it will be until James C. Malin is as fully appreciated by the historians as by the scientists and economists."

Truly a remarkable man has passed our way and time cannot erase his significant and permanent contributions which place him in the front rank of the nation's foremost scholars and teachers.