

2012

A Man of Many Firsts: John H.A. Whitman

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Recommended Citation

Klein, Beth Gelroth, "A Man of Many Firsts: John H.A. Whitman" (2012). *1925–1942: John H.A. Whitman*. Paper 1.
<http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/jhawhitman/1>

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From Time to Time

A Man of Many Firsts: John H.A. Whitman



From the ND Archives (GDEV 9):
Dr. John H.A. Whitman, 1958-1959

John H.A. Whitman first stepped onto the campus of Notre Dame in 1918 when he was hired to teach American literature and Latin in the prep school. But, the Law Library will always remember him as the first law librarian, beginning in 1921.

During his initial years as the law school's librarian, he earned several degrees at Notre Dame -- an A.B. in 1925, an A.M. in 1927, and his J.D. in 1930. To top that, he was added to the law school faculty as an assistant

professor during his senior year as a law student! He managed the modest 7,000 volume law library collection while it was located in the building that is now Crowley Hall of Music. By 1930, a new law building was erected and the collection had grown to 10,000 volumes due to the generous donations from law school graduates. In 1941 Whitman suffered a stroke which laid him up for a year and Lora Lashbrook was appointed to the position in 1942. However, when recovered, Whitman continued to serve the University as an assistant professor in the Law School and then in the History Department before he left the University.

In 1946, Whitman accepted the first lay teaching position at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania at the request of President Rev. James W. Connerton, C.S.C. This was no coincidence as King's was founded that year by the Congregation of Holy Cross from the University of Notre Dame. In addition to his teaching du-

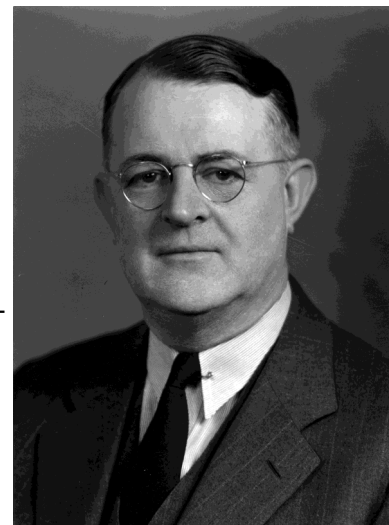
ties in History and French, Whitman established the library and operated the college bookstore. Later he became the first chairman of the History Department. In 1953 the King's College Historical Society, the Herodontans, established a history essay contest in his name. In 1956 the senior class dedicated the yearbook "Regis" to him (the first layman so honored.) Whitman retired from teaching in 1958 but he continued in his position as Director of the Evening Session, a position he held from its inception in 1953.

He was a bachelor who, in the words of one student, "...gave of himself completely for the cause of the education of young men." At the end of his life in 1962 he succumbed to a heart attack during what was his daily routine -- visiting colleagues on campus after attending morning Mass. One line in a friend's editorial captures the essence of the man. "Thus he died as he unquestionably would have wanted—at his post only minutes after meeting his daily religious obligation." King's College still honors his memory by awarding The John H.A. Whitman Distinguished Service Professorship in recognition of an extended record of exceptional services to King's.

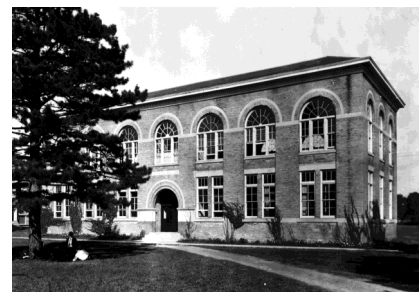
Born John Harris Aloysius in 1888 in Providence, Rhode Island, Whitman attended Boston Preparatory School and received a Litt. B. in 1912 from College de St. Laurent, Montreal, Canada. He studied theology at Laval University and returned to St. Laurent in 1914 to teach French and English. In 1917 he taught French in Little Rock, Arkansas, and came to Notre Dame in 1918 to teach American literature and Latin in the prep school.

-Beth G. Klein

From the ND Archives (GNEG 12A.17, Hoynes Hall) now Crowley Hall.



From the ND Archives (GDIS 10)



Sources:

Index to Early Notre Dame Faculty, University of Notre Dame Archives; "Spotlight Alumnus," *Notre Dame Alumnus*, 37 no. 1 (March 1959): 42. "Dr. Whitman is Stricken at King's College," *Times Leader Evening News*, February 20, 1962. Editorial, "Dr. Whitman's Death Loss to Education," *Times Leader Evening News*, February 21, 1962. "Dedication in Memorium," *Regis Yearbook*, (King's College 1962): 2.