

CHARLES COULSTON GILLISPIE

2015

This Memorial Resolution
Prepared by a special committee,
was approved by unanimous rising vote at the meeting
of the Princeton University Faculty
on December 7, 2015 and ordered spread upon the
records of the Faculty.

Charles Coulston Gillispie

At the time of his death on October 6, 2015 at the age of 97, Charles Coulston Gillispie was the Dayton-Stockton Professor of History, Emeritus. During his faculty career, beginning in 1947 and spent entirely at Princeton (he achieved emeritus status in 1987), he was a major presence in the intellectual life of the university and a major force in the discipline he established here, the history of science. Together with his friend and colleague Thomas Kuhn, and the younger scholars they cultivated, Gillispie made Princeton one of the most attractive places to do history of science in the United States, indeed, in the world. The Program in the History of Science, part of the Department of History, formally began to accept undergraduate and graduate students in 1960. Today it boasts seven full-time faculty members and eleven associated faculty both from within the Department of History and from other departments in the university. Gillispie's own research specialty was science, technology and scholarship in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. His appreciation of French culture was legendary, and he spent many semesters teaching graduate students in Paris.

A Pennsylvanian by birth, Gillispie grew up in Bethlehem in the Lehigh Valley and frequently returned there for the Christmas and Easter concerts of the "Bethlehem Bach Festival." He attended Wesleyan University as an undergraduate, majoring in chemistry and also completed a master's degree in the subject there. His further education was interrupted by the Second World War, during which he served with the United States Third Army in Europe as a captain in a heavy mortar battalion. After the close of the war, Gillispie completed his education with graduate work in history at Harvard. The shift from chemistry to history reflected what he would later call the 'joy' of the subject. Emily Clapp Gillispie, his wife of sixty-four years who

predeceased him in 2013, was his constant companion from the time he was finishing his graduate work at Harvard, where he was awarded the Ph.D. in 1949, until her death. She accompanied him on his many trips all over the world—to Europe, East Asia and South Asia—where he was a proselyte for the study of the history of science and for history and the humanities in general. He took pride in the fact that he had trained a large number of foreign students in the discipline, students who went on to have distinguished careers in their own countries—Princeton in the service of other nations, long before the clause became part of the university's official motto.

Charles Gillispie's scholarly production was enormous and profound, and his work as an editor extended his influence throughout the historical profession. His first major work, *Genesis and Geology* of 1951, gained in authority over time and had a new edition (wrongly called a reprint) in 1959. The original bore the subtitle *A Study in the Relations of Scientific Thought, Natural Theology, and Social Opinion in Great Britain 1790-1850*, and reflected its author's original Harvard training in English not French history. The subtitle given to the second edition was *The Influence of Scientific Discoveries on Religious Beliefs in the Decades before Darwin*. A scholar of the old school with regard to titles, Gillispie relished the long descriptive titulature of the eighteenth-century and would not let it die as long as he was publishing. He was mightily pleased when *Genesis and Geology* was reissued in 1996, forty-five years after its first appearance, and he was invited to write a new preface. He was especially pleased that the back cover declared that "everyone interested in the history of modern science . . . will want to read this book," although he drolly confessed to a member of this committee that this might be a bit of an exaggeration.

The next among his major works came out in 1959. This was Gillispie's two-volume annotated edition of Diderot's encyclopedia, which he gave the Gillispie-an title, *A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry, Manufacturing and the Technical Arts in Plates, Selected from L'Encyclopédie; ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, of Denis Diderot*. Soon after, in 1960, there appeared perhaps Gillispie's most controversial book, *The Edge of Objectivity: An Essay in the History of Scientific Ideas*. Based on his undergraduate lectures here at Princeton, the book struck many readers as a breathtaking tour de force, but others chided Gillispie for what they took as his oversimplification of the development of science in the *longue durée*, especially his insistence on its more or less steady progress. The *Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 5, pp. 182-83, seems to strike the right balance: "By 'objectivity' Gillispie meant something close to [Alexandre] Koyré's geometrical nature (but also experimental), and Gillispie traced its diffusion from physics to chemistry and biology. By no means a triumphalist paean, the work nevertheless saw science as epistemically progressive. For instance to Gillispie, Aristotelian physics was simply"—and here the author quotes Gillispie's own words—"wrong. . . . Nature is not like that."

Gillispie did not slow down his pace of publication: in 1971 there appeared *Lazare Carnot Savant: A Monograph Treating Carnot's Scientific Work, with Facsimile Reproduction of His Unpublished Writings on Mechanics and on the Calculus, and an Essay Concerning the Latter by A. P. Youschkevitch*. In 1983 he published *The Montgolfier Brothers and the Invention of Aviation, 1783-1784, with a Word on the Importance of Ballooning for the Science of Heat and for the Art of Building Railroads*. The year 1987 saw the appearance of *Monuments of Egypt, the Napoleonic Edition: The Complete Archaeological Plates from La Description de l'Égypte*.

It needs to be pointed out that while Gillispie was doing the research for all these scholarly publications, he was simultaneously the editor-in-chief of one of the great reference works of all time, the multi-volume *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, which won the Dartmouth Medal in 1981.

Relieved of the pressure of reference book editing, Charles Gillispie continued to publish major works. At one point he regarded his multi-volume *Science and Polity in France* which appeared between 1980 and 2004, as the culmination of his career. But a footnote he followed up on led him to write an article that soon turned into another monograph in 1992, *Science and Secret Weapons Development in Revolutionary France, 1792-1804: A Documentary History*. Never one to shirk hard tasks, Gillispie had always wanted to dip into the early development of statistics and probability. In the event he published still another demanding book in 1997: *Pierre-Simon Laplace, 1749-1827: A Life in Exact Science*.

Most recently, Gillispie returned to a biographical subject, Lazare Carnot, the scientist on whom he had published a monograph in 1971. It was a young Italian scholar, Raffaele Pisano, who had come upon the work while himself doing research on Lazare Carnot's scientifically adept son, Sadi. Pisano, a very junior scholar half a world away, wrote Gillispie out of the blue and asked him if he would be willing to cooperate with him in writing a substantially enhanced book on the same subject, which would update Gillispie's work and integrate Pisano's on Sadi Carnot. Gillispie could not resist. Their jointly authored—and huge—book of almost 500 pages, *Lazare and Sadi Carnot: A Scientific and Filial Relationship*, appeared in 2014. Charles Gillispie was 96.

The honors that accrued to Charles Gillispie in the course of his career were legion: besides fellowships, like the Guggenheim in 1954, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Science degree from Wesleyan University in 1971 and from Lafayette College in 2001, Princeton's Howard T. Behrman Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities in 1981, the History of Science Society's George Sarton Medal in 1984 for enduring scholarly achievement, and the International Balzan Prize for History and Philosophy of Science in 1997. He was an elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the British Academy. In 2011 he received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Princeton. He did wonder aloud at the time to one of the members of this committee whether he would be called on to receive the degree before he expired from the sun that was beating down on his bald head as he broiled during the ceremony in his signature bow tie under his academic gown.

There is one aspect of Charles Gillispie's career that seems particularly significant for Princeton University. Gillispie was one of the moving spirits in establishing the Daniel M. Sachs Class of 1960 Scholarship, which is one of the highest awards given to our undergraduates. Gillispie had mentored Sachs, who lived for only a few years after graduation, dying at the age of 28. In an interview with *Princeton Alumni Weekly* in 2010, Gillispie delighted in telling the reporter that the Sachs Scholarship program, which sends gifted students for two years of study abroad following graduation, had "succeeded beyond [his] wildest hopes." Through this program, which Charles Gillispie's generous donations have helped and will long sustain, Princeton University will continue to benefit from the moral and intellectual legacy of a truly great historian and an upright human being.

Respectfully submitted,

Angela N. H. Creager, *Thomas M. Siebel Professor in the History of Science;
Professor of History*

William C. Chester Jordan, *Dayton-Stockton Professor of History;
Chair, Department of History*

Theodore K. Rabb, *Professor of History, Emeritus*

Emily Thompson, *Professor of History*

Mister President: For the Committee I move that this Resolution be spread on the records of the Faculty and that a copy be sent to the families of David Loevner and William Sachs and to the Archivist of the University.