

2014

In Memoriam

The Editors
editor@fake.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

Recommended Citation

Editors, The (2014) "In Memoriam," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 39 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.
<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1190>
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol39/iss1/19>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact jesus@udel.edu.

IN MEMORIAM

DAVID HIGGS

David Higgs passed away in Toronto, October 20, 2014. He completed his Ph.D at the University of London in 1964 and taught for forty years at the University of Toronto in the Department of History, and was a fellow of University College. He also was a founding member of the Sexual Diversity Studies program at U of T. His training was in French history and he published *Ultraroyalism in Toulouse: From its Origins to the Revolution of 1830* (1973) and *Nobles in Nineteenth Century France: The Practice in Inegalitarianism* (1987). For many years, he was one of the organizers of the French history roundtable in Toronto, where he mentored many students beyond those he directly worked with. Simultaneously, he began important and path-breaking work on Portuguese immigration to Canada and around the world, as well as gay history in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro.

My first encounter with Professor David Higgs was at a conference at the University of Toronto in 1995, where I meekly asked him if I could put his name on a grant application for a post-doctoral fellowship. He agreed, matter-of-factly, and over the years I learned to appreciate that matter-of-fact way of his, and his general no-nonsense approach to academia. He loved being a professor and regretted having to retire at 65, just a few years before the law in Canada changed and made it unlawful to enforce retirement at any age. He loved being a professor because he loved research, and interacting with students and colleagues. His retirement was a great loss for students; his death a greater loss still.

My first impression of David Higgs was one of surprise because he was the first Anglo I had met who spoke Portuguese, and who spoke it much better than I. One of the first items on the agenda in our professor-postdoctoral student relationship was his encouragement for me to come out of the Portuguese-cultural closet, and embrace my heritage. Really? What heritage? To which ignorant response he pointed to one of his earlier publications, *A Future to Inherit: The Portuguese Communities of Canada* (1976), a book that ought to have been required reading for many of us culturally-confused children of Portuguese-speaking immigrants. He followed this up with *Portuguese Migration in Global Perspective* (1999).

I marvelled at his love for things Portuguese, and at his explanation for how he came to teach Portuguese history at the University of Toronto. David Higgs began as a French historian, but he switched to Portuguese because he liked Portuguese people more, to which I joked that he had not met my family. And so our relationship developed, a reluctant Portuguese and a wannabee, who together enjoyed a few precious moments, from a glass of wine on a terrace in Sardinia, to an impromptu picnic on the beach of Lake Winnipeg, where we were joined by Daniel Vickers, my PhD advisor at Memorial University of Newfoundland, himself a former student of David Higgs in Toronto. What goes around, comes around.

David Higgs was a great support in my academic endeavours, not in gushing or exaggerated terms, but in a manner that was to the point, and endearing. During one of our consultations in his office, I asked him for some advice as I prepared for a job interview, and so he told me: get a haircut, don't talk about your mother, and drop that tree-hugging look of yours. I failed on all three counts (and didn't get the job in question). Over the years, reading the reports from anonymous reviewers of my grant applications, I always knew when one of them was penned by David Higgs, for invariably his tone basically implied that, "Well, yes, this seems worth doing, if only she'd get around to doing it."

Professional yet accessible, supportive without pretence, witty and generous of spirit, David Higgs taught me a good deal about common sense, particularly in relation to our mutual love of research. His example is well worth imitating: take your work seriously, yourself less so. I miss him already. Merci. Obrigado. Thank you.

Darlene Abreu-Ferreira
University of Winnipeg

DAVID E. VASSBERG

David E. Vassberg, a long-time member of the Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies, died on November 26, 2014, after a long illness. He was active in the association, organizing sessions and presenting papers at annual meetings and serving on the Executive Committee for two terms.

David's extensive scholarship focused mainly on Castilian rural history in the early modern period, and his work won critical acclaim from experts on both sides of the Atlantic. He published three books: *La venta de tierras baldías: El comunitarismo agrario y la corona de Castilla durante el siglo XVI* (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones Agrarias, Ministerio de Agricultura, 1983); *Land and Society in Golden Age Castile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, Spanish translation, Barcelona: Crítica, 1986); and *Village and the Outside World in Golden Age Castile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); plus numerous articles on families, rural life, and related topics. His pioneering article "Concerning Pigs, the Pizarros, and the Agro-Pastoral Background of the Conquerors of Peru" (*Latin American Research Review*, 1978) reflected his abiding interest in swine-herding in the Spanish colonization of the Americas. He also carried out research on Spanish debates about oxen versus mules as traction animals.

David's background and personal experiences were important in defining his scholarly interests. His father and grandfather were successful farmers in the Río Grande Valley of southern Texas. He and his two brothers grew up working alongside the Mexican and Mexican-American farm workers his father employed. All three boys learned fluent Spanish at an early age, and their parents made sure they knew about European cultural and intellectual traditions. As David matured, neither farm life nor the world of scholarship appealed to him, at least initially. Those who knew him will remember his deep, rich voice. As a young man, he had operatic ambitions and studied singing in New York City for two years. He began college as a

music major but switched to history and earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Texas-Austin. Music remained an important part of his life, however; his earliest publications focused on Heitor Villa-Lobos and the music of Brazil.

After college, David returned to his roots and farmed in the Río Grande Valley for five years. During that time, he met and married a French exchange student, Liliane Mangold, and his interests again turned to scholarship as they started a family. David completed his M.A. and Ph.D. in history at the University of Texas-Austin, working with the legendary Nettie Lee Benson, the guiding force behind the Latin American Library that now bears her name. His doctoral thesis took advantage of his interests and his determination to conduct research in an appealing place—Spain. Degree in hand, David accepted a position at Pan American University in Edinburg, Texas, which later became the University of Texas-Pan American. As their two sons grew, Liliane earned a Ph.D. in French literature at UT-Austin and then joined David on the faculty at UT-Pan American.

In retirement, David and Liliane remained active in scholarly pursuits and travel. One of David's post-retirement projects was to write a history of the small Swedish-American community where he was raised, which no longer exists. The result was *Stockholm on the Rio Grande: A Swedish Farming Colony on the Mesquite Frontier of Southernmost Texas (1912-1985)* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003).

Over the course of his career, David received many honors, including two NEH Research Fellowships, an NIH Research Fellowship, and a visiting research professorship at the University of Valladolid. In 2005, he was elected a corresponding member of Spain's Real Academia de la Historia. In addition to Liliane, David leaves two sons and their families, all of whom live in Austin. Those who knew him will miss his warmth, his dry wit, and his unwavering commitment to the highest scholarly ideals.

William D. Phillips, Jr.
Carla Rahn Phillips