

earned her Ph.D. in 1949 with a dissertation on the Provincial Deputation in Mexico.

In 1955 she published her classic work *La Diputación Provincial y el federalismo mexicano*, showing that Mexican federalism had emerged from Spanish and Mexican traditions rather than as a mere copy of the U.S. variety. She continued to publish until the end; in fact shortly before she died she had submitted a monograph to the Texas A & M University Press, "Texas Viewed from Mexico."

In 1962 she became a Professor of History and continued in that position until 1989 as well as Professor in the Graduate School of Library Science (1964-1975). During those years numbers of today's most eminent scholars benefitted from her vigorous teaching methods, standards, and generosity, as did the hoards of researchers who passed her way at the Latin American Collection that was named for her in 1975.

She received many honors including the Casa de las Americas Prize from Cuba, the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Texas in 1981, and the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award in 1984. The Conference on Latin American History presented her with its Distinguished Service Award in 1976 and the American Historical Association recognized her Distinguished Service in 1989. In 1979 she received the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor granted by the Mexican government to foreigners. In addition to these, she greatly cherished her warm friendships with numerous Latin Americans including Don Daniel Cosío Villegas.

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#### A STUDENT REMEMBRANCE

We history students of Nettie Lee Benson admired and respected, loved and feared her all at the same time. How could we not admire and respect her for her knowledge and dedication to Mexican history and the energy she poured into making the Latin American collection at the University of Texas among the best in the world. How could we not love her for the personal attention and respect she showered upon us. How could we not fear her for the "do it, or else" demands she placed upon us. We all pretty much agreed that she was a tough-minded, no nonsense lady riven with affection for Mexican history and those who studied it. What more could a graduate student ask for in a mentor?

Of course, we all had our Nettie Lee Benson stories. I remember my first reading seminar with her. The previous semester our professor had assigned a reasonable book a week in English or maybe a couple of articles in Spanish. Nettie Lee roared in commanding at least twice that amount; I caught the first volume of one of her favorites, *Historia moderna de México*. Ugh! "Just the "Vida Política of La República Restaurada," she said, but that was 925 pages of text. A couple of seminars later one of my colleagues fell behind the pace but still tried to impress Miss Benson with his erudition. She listened patiently with tightened lips, an occasional tilt of the

head, that Benson stare, and on completion of the report said simply: "I'd suggest that next time you read the book." That kind of remark sure caught our attention. We giggled (always out of earshot) about the way she slandered "Santy Anner" and revered "Remos Risper," but how we respected and loved that woman. I wish now that we had shown more forthrightly to her those wonderful feelings that we admitted to ourselves, but maybe we did so anyway in our silent ways.

Boy, did she protect us from our tormentors. I remember my orals (who can forget them?). I had taken a minor in contemporary Spanish history, and as Texas had no staff person in the field, I studied with visiting professors. The visitor at the time of my orals was Arthur Whitaker from the University of Pennsylvania, which he spelled Ivy League with a capital "P." I had not read a book with him, yet he was the assigned inquisitor. He started—the first question from my first examiner: "I was reading the *New York Times* this morning about certain events going on in Spain. I was wondering if you could not tell us about those matters in historical context." I flipped. While preparing for my exams, I had not read an outside newspaper (only the *Daily Texan*) for weeks. "Well, Dr. Whitaker . . .," I stumbled along, but Nettie Lee rode to the rescue: "I don't think the question is appropriate," and that ended that embarrassment. It was vintage Benson Texana shutting down the Ivy League. Then there was the time that Stanley Ross tried to do me in during my dissertation defense. Ross had just arrived at the University, had nothing to do with my dissertation, but seemed anxious to make his mark. He thought I had whitewashed the Rurales some and was carping (to put it kindly) in his criticism Nettie Lee jumped in with both feet: "Well, Dr. Ross, I see that Paul has the documentation—he has read the documents—and I think he is entitled to his point of view." Debate ended. Welcome to U-T, Dr. Ross. Meet Nettie Lee Benson.

Nettie Lee had not always called me "Paul." In the early years of graduate school, we kept our distance, which, of course, is the way it should have been. She may have warmed up to me some when I selected the dissertation topic that she suggested. Here's how that "suggestion" came about. I had read about the Rurales in one of those gigantic tomes of *Historia moderna*, and remarked in a seminar that someone ought to research and write about the constabulary. Nettie glanced up: "You're right, and you're it." That's when I became "seriously interested in" the Rurales, and it astounded me how much my mentor already knew about my subject. It was during those rather businesslike, academic conversations about the Porfirian police that I came to know Miss Benson as the sensitively warm, yet rip roaring Texan that she was.

Nettie Lee even liked Texas football (in an epoch when the Longhorns were easier to like), and could hook 'em horns with the best of fans. I went to a few games with her, which is where I learned that this rather restrained lady had deep down reserved some Texana purple prose for faltering Longhorns. Lord, she knew as much about football as she did the provincial deputations. But her first love was history, not only of Mexico, but of her home town of Sinton and her family. Rather recently I was chatting with her about the mobilization of the national guard on the

south Texas border during a diplomatically delicate phase of the Mexican Revolution. "I remember those boys coming through Sinton on the train," recalled Miss Benson. "All of us young girls went down to the tracks and waived at them." Anything more? "Well, we talked to some of them too," she chuckled. Professor Benson could take a kidding.

One of my last contacts with Miss Benson occurred a couple of years ago at her home in Austin. She said that she was still working hard (and U-Texas Press subsequently published her new book), but that she felt weak all the time and could not hear very well anymore. She lamented that her loss of hearing had recently caused her to leave teaching. Truth is, the loss was ours'. Then I started to chat with her about my new project, how enthused I was about it and what I intended to write about it. "You can't say that," she bellowed with all of that wonderful, old Nettie Lee Benson fire, and she proceeded to tell me why, all based on sound historical evidence. I was thunderstruck—and thoroughly satisfied. What a mentor, what a friend.

Oh, Nettie Lee, Professor Benson. How we students appreciate you. We love you, miss you, remember and honor you.

#### NETTIE LEE BENSON—ROLE MODEL

I suspect Miss Benson would have objected to the title of this brief acknowledgment; she was a member of "the old school" and viewed people as individuals, rather than representatives of something larger. It was part of her charm that Miss Benson was always completely herself. You knew she had a solid sense of the good and the true, and sometimes she scared the living daylights out of you. Hers was a presence to be reckoned with, a good opinion to be won strictly on your merits as a scholar.

How refreshing she was! Unapologetically enamored of a country reputed to be *más macho que todo*, standing shoulder to shoulder with the *machos* on our side of the border, she won their grudging respect. To younger women, hers was a career to be admired at a time when so few bright females rose above secretary or grade school teacher. True, she didn't "have it all," but she never expected to.

Miss Benson gave us more than that. She showed female scholars throughout the United States who came in contact with her, that they could study Mexican history in a way different from that boasted of by their male professors. She spoke of the importance of sharing ideas with Mexican scholars, not of nights at male-only cantinas. She was a trail blazer at a time when some Mexican scholars and archivists thought women from the United States came to their country "for only one thing." She continued her study of political and legal institutions even during the decades when her male counterparts contended they didn't matter. (Miss Benson having the last laugh on that one.) Even her distinctive way of pronouncing Spanish, much