



Harry F. Thernal

The dean of modern-day scholars

Upon learning of the death of John Andrew Munroe, I turned to my Delaware bookshelves to refresh my memory on the written legacy he has left us of our state's history.

But Munroe's most lasting legacy lies in the many former students, multitude of friends and average Delawareans to whom he conveyed a love of Delaware's unique history — this columnist among them. Perhaps no one has done more to stimulate an abiding interest in the roots of today's Delaware.

From the volumes of Thomas Scharf, Christopher Ward and H. Clay Reed, to the work of C. A. Weslager and Harold Hancock, to more recent books by William Williams and Carol Hoffecker, Delaware has been chronicled thoroughly and vividly by these and many others. Munroe, though, can truly be called the dean of modern-day Delaware scholars.

He continued to research and write past his 90th year. His last original book, "Philadelphians and Other Essays Relating to Delaware," was published just two years ago. It includes an autobiography of his forebears' emigration to America, the native Wilmingtonian's own working-class origin, his stumbling into teaching high school history and how he came to become a professor at the University of Delaware.

In books, articles, columns in the former *Morning News* and other writing, Munroe was always scholarly yet eminently readable. Among historians he was hailed for his thorough research, which could demolish commonly held and erroneous beliefs. Over the years he won many honors, perhaps most importantly the first Governor's Heritage Award from Gov. Ruth Ann Minner and the Francis Allison Award, the highest honor that the university can bestow.

It's tough to single out any one book or article as his most important historical literary contribution. Outstanding among them are his history of his alma mater; his standard "History of Delaware"; the definitive "Colonial Delaware," recently reprinted by the Delaware Heritage Commission; "Federalist Delaware" and the massive "Louis McLane: Federalist and Jacksonian," both covering post-Revolutionary America.

Munroe's legacy can be tapped by future scholars because he donated his extensive papers to the university library. His name is also permanently on the Newark campus on Munroe Hall, named in 1997 as the home of the Department of Anthropology and History. His 60 years' affiliation with UD included his chairing the history department.

Munroe must also be hailed for his personal courage. Long-time physical health problems, that would have grounded many, never kept him from active participation in Delaware's scholarly and cultural life. His ability to remain involved until the very last days is also a tribute to Dorothy, his wife of 60 years, who was his constant companion, cheerleader and wheelchair pusher.

It is as a mentor and inspiration, though, that Munroe should and will be most remembered. How many Delawareans today owe their love of history to Munroe? Those who learned from and befriended Munroe knew him as unassuming, never flaunting the vast knowledge he possessed.

As remembered by his friend, UD President David Roselle, Munroe was the perfect embodiment of the gentleman scholar" and "a jewel of a gentleman."

One way the university could memorialize him would be to restore in his name a mandatory basic course in Delaware history and government, which had been mandated by the Legislature in 1910 and required for graduation until 1973.

As I recall, it was not an exciting course, taught in my case by someone other than Munroe, but modern technology can make it a desired subject.

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