

## MEMORIAL

### Enno E. Kraehe (1921–2008)

*Robert D. Billinger, Jr.*

**E**NNO Edward Kraehe, William M. Corcoran Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Virginia, died at the University of Virginia Medical Center on Thursday, December 4, 2008, five days before his eighty-seventh birthday. He was the leading American scholar on the Congress of Vienna and of its most important and colorful participant, Prince Clemens von Metternich.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, on December 9, 1921, Enno traveled a considerable distance from his Midwestern roots and education. He received an A.B. and M.A. from the University of Missouri in 1943 and 1944, and a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1948. But he did most of his teaching and writing at the University of Kentucky (1948–1964), the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (1964–1968), and the University of Virginia (1968–1991). He also evolved a long way from his original interest in the philosophy of history to becoming best known in the United States and Europe as the “microhistorical” expert on Prince Metternich, whose German policy he documented in two masterful volumes that appeared in 1963 and 1983.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his doctoral work with the distinguished diplomatic historian, Lawrence D. Steefel at the University of Minnesota, his doctoral dissertation, “A History of the German Confederation, 1851–66,” and a Fulbright Research Scholarship to Austria in 1952–1953, Kraehe harbored philosophical inclinations. His journey toward microhistory began in the Vienna archives as a Guggenheim Fellow in 1960–1961.

That journey can be traced in some surviving correspondence with Professor Charles Delzell of Vanderbilt University in the winter and early spring of 1960. From the University of Kentucky, the young professor, then only 39, wrote that he would be glad to give a paper in a session of the Southern Historical Association (SHA) to be held in Tulsa. “My own interests relate more to epistemological problems in general than to any particular historian,” he wrote. “In this

<sup>1</sup>Enno E. Kraehe, *Metternich's Germany Policy*, vol. I, *The Contest with Napoleon 1799–1814* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), and vol. II, *The Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

connection I have been doing abstracts from half a dozen philosophical journals for *Historical Abstracts* . . . I think that I would be qualified to speak on something like ‘The Present State of the Problem of History’ or ‘An Existentialist View of History.’ I have been so long wrapped up in Metternich that it is good to have a prod in the direction of historical theory again, which was really the avenue by which I got into the field.”<sup>2</sup>

But by April 1961 things began to change permanently. Kraehe wrote to Dr. Delzell that he regretted having to withdraw from the SHA program in order to avail himself of a Guggenheim Fellowship. “I cannot convincingly say that I would rather be in Tulsa than Vienna working directly on Metternich, but I had looked forward to this meeting with particular relish.”<sup>3</sup> Enno was off to Vienna, the archives, fame as a Metternich scholar, and on the way to microhistory.

Kraehe’s master work has been his two-volume *Metternich’s German Policy*. The first volume, *The Contest with Napoleon, 1799–1814*, grew out of his interest in the German Confederation and his realization that categories such as state versus nation and reaction versus liberal reforms were remote from the issues that concerned the statesmen at the time. As he noted in the preface, “An understanding of their ambitions and motives [was] a precondition for an objective history of the German Confederation, and since Metternich’s role in the Confederation was paramount, the investigation led to him.”<sup>4</sup> Thus Enno’s road to microhistory commenced. His major contribution in *Metternich’s German Policy*, volume I, was to conclude that it was not the Federal Act of 1815, but Metternich’s failed hope to mediate an end to war, while maintaining Napoleon and his status quo in Europe, that was most important to understand. Having failed at peace making, Metternich planned the preservation of a variant of the Confederation of the Rhine (the German Confederation), but under international guarantee instead of under Napoleon. The “reactionary” Metternich of earlier literature became the realistic preserver of the status quo.

The intended chronological scope of volume II was to be the years from 1814 to 1820, stressing the contest with Alexander of Russia. The second volume, when it appeared in 1983, bore the subtitle *The Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815*. To the dismay of some critics, the master historian decided to do the archival work “to get the story right” about the Congress of Vienna before moving beyond it. One appreciative reviewer noted that “This volume, like the first, is both a model of scholarship and a connoisseur’s delight. Its twenty-two pages of bibliography and careful footnoting are a

<sup>2</sup>Kraehe to Delzell, January 13, 1960. Copy of this letter shared with the author by June Burton, Emeritus Professor, Akron University, August 29, 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Kraehe to Delzell, April 19, 1960. Copy of this letter shared with the author by Jane Burton, August 29, 2005.

<sup>4</sup>Kraehe, *Metternich’s German Policy*, vol. I, vii.

boon to scholars of early nineteenth-century diplomacy, and its rhetorical craftsmanship is an example of fine ‘microhistory.’” The reviewer also noted that “After twenty pages covering one week of negotiations between October 7 and 14, 1814, [Kraeche writes] ‘only a week had passed—[but] it may seem longer to the weary reader of these events.’” Kraeche’s patiently presented microhistory yielded a new image of the past: Metternich’s German policy at the Congress of Vienna consisted in building consensus against what he considered the true dangers of his day: “Wholesale territorial upheavals, arbitrary interference with functioning bureaucratic systems, and . . . misguided efforts to return Germany to the status quo of 1803.” Kraeche’s careful study of “familiar events” led to a radically new assessment of a Congress of Vienna that had been so often studied, but never understood within its historical context.<sup>5</sup>

In this wonderful volume II of *Metternich’s German Policy*, Kraeche engaged in what he half-facetiously called microhistory. To his surprise he was roundly criticized by some reviewers for the concept and its practice. Once criticized, however, microhistory became a focus for his continuing reflection. It became the basis for an address to the European History Section (EHS) of the Southern Historical Association in fall 1988. That address, “From Macro- to Microhistory: A Journey Out of Season,” is an autobiographical journey.

The description of that journey that he shared with EHS luncheon guests was provoked in part by the remarks of the speaker at the EHS luncheon the year before, William H. McNeill. McNeill’s talk in 1987 was devoted to the historiography of Arnold Toynbee. It revealed McNeill’s continuing enthusiasm for the work of a macrohistorian par excellence. But then along came Enno Kraeche. As Hegel would have said: thesis (macrohistory à la Toynbee via McNeill) produced antithesis (microhistory) presented by Kraeche.

Kraeche had started out his academic career infatuated with macrohistory. He was, he admitted, an Oswald Spengler man, even “toting around campus the heavy one-volume edition (the English one, I should add; I didn’t read German then) . . . quoting to captive listeners.” Even as his first infatuation with Spengler faded, the young scholar was drawn to what he called “the grand patterns . . . in metaphysics and epistemology.” Robin G. Collingwood and Friedrich Meinecke became “the new gods.” He found radical historicism, the view that one must study particulars, but realize that mental categories are shaped by the historical process. But then, Kraeche’s research in European archives had a major impact on the developing scholar. “The archives were eye openers. It was like Keats first looking into Chapman’s Homer or the first time a microscope exposed the beauty and teeming life in stagnant water.”

<sup>5</sup>Robert D. Billinger, Jr., “Review of *Metternich’s German Policy*, vol. II, *The Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815*,” *Slavic Review* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 709–710.

It was about finding what was there: using “working hypotheses perhaps, but no large preconceptions.”<sup>6</sup>

Kraehe became the docent of diplomatic historians, a patron of graduate students, his many *Doktorkinder*, and national and international colleagues working in central European history. He was on the board of editors of *Central European History* from 1967 to 1972, a very active member of the AHA’s Conference Group for Central European History, and a member of the board of editors of *Austrian History Yearbook* from 1969 to 1973.

But, Kraehe did not confine himself narrowly to central European interests any more than he confined himself or his students to microhistory. His plea was that microhistory not be confused with narrow specialization. His call for attention to archival research and historical detail was not a summons to a narrowing of the intellect or the fragmentation of professional societies. He detested both and saw each growing apace. He praised comparative history, just as he always praised the attendance of European historians at Southern Historical Association meetings with their offerings of American and non-U.S. sessions. He was one of the “Founding Fathers” of the European History Section of the Southern Historical Association in 1955, and he was celebrated for that in a paper at a special SHA session in Atlanta in 2005.<sup>7</sup> His strong feelings for the SHA led him to mentor his students to attend its diverse sessions even as he urged them to submit their work in the John L. Snell Prize Seminar Paper competitions sponsored by the EHS. With a total of seven student winners, he had the single largest number of students to win that prize. The secret, he said, was to help students find good topics and then simply to have them send in their papers for consideration. The trick was to keep trying.<sup>8</sup> Kraehe talked the talk, walked the walk, and encouraged his colleagues and students to do the same.

Enno was a devoted husband to his wife, Mary Alice (nee Eggleston), a university librarian; and a loving father to his two children, Claudia and Lawrence, and grandfather to his three grandchildren. He was also a very caring and gracious *Doktorvater*. He recommended his *Doktorkinder* for book reviewing assignments, searched for the best *Milchrahmstrudel* that Vienna had to offer a visiting student, and telephoned frequently to express his concern for a former student whose wife was dying of cancer. Throughout his life, he was a lover of opera and classical music, particularly Richard Strauss, Schubert, and

<sup>6</sup>The Joseph J. Matthews Address (at the 1988 Annual Meeting of the SHA in Norfolk, Virginia: Enno Kraehe, “From Macro- to Microhistory: A Journey Out of Season,” in *Essays in European History: Selected From the Annual Meetings of the Southern Historical Association 1988–1989*, ed. June K. Burton and Carolyn W. White (New York: University Press of America, n.d.), 1–9.

<sup>7</sup>Robert D. Billinger, Jr., “Enno Kraehe: Metternich, Microhistory, and Milchrahmstrudel,” Southern Historical Association Annual Meeting, Atlanta Meeting, November 4, 2005: Session 38.

<sup>8</sup>Telephone conversation with Enno Kraehe, September 13, 2005.

Beethoven. He was also an avid traveler, a passionate swimmer, and a St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan. He graciously shared both his academic interests and his avocations with his students and friends. He took the families of former students to his swimming club near Charlottesville and enthusiastically welcomed a new graduate student who wandered into his office wearing a Cardinals baseball cap.

Finally, Enno was a role model of upbeat bravery. Though in his last days he was blind, had two forms of cancer, and lived with a feeding tube, he went to the polls in fall 2008 to cast his vote. His memorial service on Saturday, December 13, 2008, at the University of Virginia Chapel, was memorable for its music and for the fond memories it evoked of a brave man, a fine scholar, a family man, and a mentor.

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