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C. K. CHAMBERLAIN: HISTORIAN, TEACHER, EDITOR
by Carl L. Davis

The retirement of Dr. C. K. Chamberlain from the faculty of Stephen F. Austin University and from the position of Editor-in-Chief of the *East Texas Historical Journal* was an occasion for pause and reflection among his many friends and associates who have known and worked with him over the years. I have known Dr. Chamberlain for a decade, and consider my association with him as my great good fortune.

I first met C. K. Chamberlain on a warm September day in the early 1960's, shortly after my appointment to the faculty of Stephen F. Austin College. He was not at all what I had expected of a senior professor and department head. I was in that stage of life which might be called "post-graduate school withdrawal" and was torn between fear of the slave driving senior professors and the desire to rise to a position where I could imitate them. I expected that Dr. Charles Kincheloe Chamberlain, Professor and Head of the Department of



History and Political Science, would be a stern visaged, aloof man who wore his rank and office like a badge, and who condescendingly referred to a junior faculty member as "young man". Instead, I saw before me a smiling, pleasant man of slightly below medium height who introduced himself as Dick Chamberlain. That day we had a long conversation in which he proved both helpful and considerate. It took me only five minutes to know that he was a man whom I could like; and less than five more minutes to know that he was a man whom I could respect. Over the years my affection and admiration for him has grown. I am, however, only one of legions who feel the same way.

Dick Chamberlain is a man who lives a full life. He is honored by his students, colleagues, friends and associates. A man of seeming boundless energy, he enthusiastically serves his students, his university, his community and his church with all his many and varied talents.

C. K. Chamberlain was born September 3, 1900, in Burnet, Texas, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Burkett Barton Chamberlain, a farming and ranching family. After graduating from Gateway High School, he attended Howard Payne College and West Texas State College, receiving his degree from the latter institution in 1926. He began his teaching career in public education as principal of the Knox City High School in 1921. He continued his education and received his Masters of Arts degree from the University of Texas in 1928.

Dr. Chamberlain and his new bride, the former Ruth Britt, began their long association with the East Texas area in 1928 when he accepted a position as a history teacher in the Nacogdoches high school. They had one son, the late Major Ken Burkett Chamberlain, U.S.A.F. While in the Nacogdoches school system Dr. Chamberlain served not only as a teacher, but as principal of the high school for sixteen years and as

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superintendent of the public school system during World War II.

C. K. Chamberlain joined the History and Political Science Department at Stephen F. Austin State University in 1946. He completed his Doctor in Philosophy degree at the University of Texas in January of 1957, and became chairman of the department in August of that year. When he came to that post, the department had but seven members and a limited number of courses. The growth of the department was rapid, and the number of courses and the quality of the instruction increased greatly during his tenure. In 1965 the department was divided and Dr. Chamberlain retained his chairmanship of the History Department. His faculty was both competent and cooperative. He hired without prejudice; and at a time when many were still reluctant to offer positions to women Dr. Chamberlain actively encouraged them to join our faculty. Despite predictions of dire disaster and some feeling that Dick Chamberlain's toleration was finally going to get him into trouble, no such disaster developed. The members of the department now fully agree, and feel that the presence of women on the staff added balance and strength to the department. When Dr. Chamberlain stepped down from the chairmanship in 1969, his department numbered twenty members, most of whom held the Doctor of Philosophy degree. His building of the history department was a remarkable achievement.

After passing on the burden of the chairmanship to Professor Robert S. Maxwell, Dr. Chamberlain continued, as he always had, teaching and advising his students-rejoicing with them in their good fortune, consoling them in their great and small tragedies just as he did with their parents and grandparents a generation or two ago. As both teacher and man, no one is more genuinely liked or held in higher regard by both the students and faculty on the University campus. Quoting a 1957 newspaper article: "A favorite among all SFA students and faculty, Dr. Chamberlain had been elected 'favorite teacher' in the Austinite poll for several years." He has won that award a number of times since.

He devoted himself to every activity to help encourage the students of the University. He sponsored many organizations, among them Theta Chi, Phi Alpha Theta, Alpha Phi Omega, the Board of Directors of the College Center, the House Council, the Young Democrats, and the Cheerleaders. He has probably served on every standing college and university committee ever formed on his campus. He has done particularly outstanding work on the Graduate Studies Committee, Liberal Arts Curriculum Committee, the University Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Advisory Council.

With all of his various activities at the University, teaching was still his first love. Even in his last year of teaching, he continued to revise and rewrite his lectures for his students' benefit. His classroom technique was often informal. He was a master of class discussion, but he always attempted to avoid embarrassment of his students, and had rapport with his students like no one I have ever known. His students worked for him because they were inspired to work, and because they did not wish to disappoint him by failing to do so. In all of the courses he taught he prepared them with thoroughness and diligence, and his students never felt short changed. Yet with all of his knowledge and skill in the classroom, he was always honest, both professionally and personally with his students. If he did not know an answer to a student's question he was quick to admit it and to tell the student that he would try to find it before the next meeting of the class.

With a wide variety of teaching and scholarly interests, including Texas and Southwestern history, Eastern Europe and the Far East, Dr. Chamberlain was professionally active off the campus as well as on. He is a member of a number of professional organizations including the following: Atlantic Council of the United States, Council of Foreign Relations, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Organization of American Historians, Southern Historical Association, Southwestern Social Science Association, Texas Historical Association, and the East Texas Historical Association. In addition he has held, at one time or another, offices or

important committee posts in every one of these organizations. He attends a number of meetings of these associations each year, and has acted as chairman of numerous sessions at the Southwestern Social Science Association, the Southern Historical Association, the Texas Historical Association and the East Texas Historical Association. He has been chairman of the history session of the Southwestern Social Science Association and a member of its Board of Directors.

Dr. Chamberlain developed a complete set of visual aids for Texas history which he published with W. T. Chambers of the Geography Department of Stephen F. Austin State University, now retired. He has written a number of articles for the *Handbook of Texas* including "Stephen F. Austin State University" and "East Texas." He has published articles dealing with L. T. Barrett and the first oil well in East Texas, and the old East Texas Historical Association which went out of existence in the 1940's. In addition, he has numerous book reviews, and has recently completed his manuscript of a biography of Alexander Watkins Terrell.

Dr. Chamberlain has wide experience as an editor. He was Editor-in-Chief of the *East Texas Historical Journal*, for which he wrote the "East Texas" section for each issue. He has served as second editor of the *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, and on the editorial boards of the *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, the *Journal of Southern History* and the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*.

If C. K. Chamberlain ever stopped long enough to think of a personal motto—or if his modesty would permit—that motto would be "service." His role as an individual, and his role as an important member of a university faculty has been service. Limited space permits only a few examples. In 1957 he founded the East Texas Area Council for the Social Studies. He brought high school and grade school teachers to the SFA campus, and set up valuable seminars for their benefit. In 1962 he founded the history contest held on the campus to encourage high school seniors to investigate careers in the field. In 1963 he was one of the founders of the East Texas Historical Association, and became the first editor of its bi-annual journal. He held this post until his retirement in 1971, at which time the duties of that office were given to Dr. Archie P. McDonald of the History Department at Stephen F. Austin State University. Dr. Chamberlain believes that laymen and scholars should work together. The ETHA has shown that it can be done without friction. It has been an instructive experience of human relations.

In service to the community no one has given so completely and unselfishly. Dr. Chamberlain is an active member of the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club, and is a past president of both organizations. He has been chairman of the Nacogdoches County Crippled Children and Adults Society. He never has failed to meet his quota. He is a sponsor of the Nacogdoches County Boy Scouts Association. He is a member of the committee on existing industry and the committee on new industry. He is an active conservationist. He has worked constantly to improve communications and relations between the town and the University.

Dick Chamberlain started in the 1930's trying to better the lot of the Negroes and Latin Americans who live in this area. He was able to provide some industrial and athletic equipment to the then separate Negro high school, even though it was not popular to do so at the time. He worked for the improvement of the water and sanitation systems of the minority areas and encouraged the minorities to vote. It was a small beginning, but it was a beginning. He has advised the bi-racial Community Relations Council and the Voters' League. He has been active in supporting the Head Start Programs and the child day care centers. What others learned in the 1960's about the need to support human dignity Dick Chamberlain was practicing forty years ago—long before it became fashionable. His views are so respected in the community that he can say, in his own quiet way, the things for which others would be condemned. His long, diligent work for the community has earned him the right to be heard; and the

entire community is better for it.

Dr. Chamberlain is active in the Methodist Church. He is a member of the Board of Stewards, Chairman of the Church Commission, member of the Committee for Social Concern and the teacher of the adult Sunday school class.

In politics Dr. Chamberlain served as County Democratic Chairman from 1958-1960. He won the post again in 1966, 1968, and 1970. He feels that his job is to see that all candidates get a fair hearing, and he organized county-wide meetings to allow them to express their views on the issues. He feels that the public is entitled to an honest election and a fair count. All Democrats, whether very liberal, very conservative or any position in between, trust him implicitly. He has never violated their trust.

Dr. Chamberlain is a popular speaker, and seldom refuses an invitation. He has spoken many times to every service club in the city, to most of the clubs in the county, and to many of the service organizations in the East Texas area.

With all his popularity, he has not sought any course of action because it was popular. He tries to do what is right and what his conscience tells him should be done. He speaks and acts honestly, and he is respected for it. Many have disagreed with him over the years, but no one has ever questioned his motives or doubted his integrity.

Dr. Chamberlain has received many honors. He is a charter national member of Phi Alpha Theta, the honorary history fraternity. He has been elected to important posts in every organization of which he is a member, whether academic, social or political. He has received the Silver Beaver award from the Boy Scouts of America. He has been chosen a delegate to the state Democratic convention for so many times that no one can remember when he did not hold the post. He has many times been a state Democratic committeeman; and he is always his own voting precinct's chairman when not serving as county chairman.

On campus he has been "favorite teacher," marshal of the homecoming parade and president of the men's faculty club. In 1971 he received the coveted Minnie Stevens Piper Award, an honor given to very few Texans in the field of higher education. But the honors which I believe he most cherishes are the little ones given him by his students and former students when they drop in to chat with him. I walked into his office several months ago and found there General Kenneth Kennedy, Commander of the United States Army Engineers in Europe, who had driven out of his way to talk with a well remembered man who had once taught him history. General Kennedy recalled that he had been number one in history in his graduating class at West Point, and he believed much of the credit for that belonged to Dr. Chamberlain. This is only one example, but there are many others in which students of past years write and visit him. He is a man they wish to remember--a man whom they cannot forget.

It is impossible to recount all of the work Dr. Chamberlain has done, or all of the rewards he has received in over half a century of service in education and in the community. Nor is that service at an end. His retirement from the faculty at Stephen F. Austin and from the editorship of the *East Texas Historical Journal* does not bring his contributions to a close. He is active in all of the organizations of which he is a member; and he is constantly taking on new tasks. In addition to his usual activities, he is an advisor on the Trinity River Project, and he is Supervisor of Adult Education for Angelina, Nacogdoches, San Augustine, and Shelby counties.

Those of us who have the honor to be associated with Dr. Chamberlain can only consider themselves fortunate. He is a Christian gentleman of the old school. We need more such men.