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## Review of *Harry Kirke Wolfe: Pioneer in Psychology*, by Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Harry Kirke Wolfe: Pioneer in Psychology.** Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. xi + 200 pp. Photographs, appendix, bibliography, and notes. \$30.00 cloth (ISBN 0-8032-1196-1).

While teaching at Nebraska Wesleyan University, Ludy Benjamin discovered that the first psychology professor at the University of Nebraska gained a place in the history of experimental psychology in the United States. Harry K. Wolfe received a doctorate from the University of Leipzig, where he studied with Wilhelm Wundt (one of the founders of experimental psychology). In 1889 Wolfe established the first undergraduate psychology laboratory in the United States. Benjamin has written this interesting and readable book about a great teacher. The story includes the saga of academic life at a fledgling public university, one man's experience of the debate between rational and empirical knowledge of man, an account of the fragility of academic freedom, and a compelling description of a scholar who made students a high priority.

This book recounts Wolfe's life from his boyhood days on a farm near Lincoln, through a distinguished undergraduate career at the University of Nebraska, and into his graduate career in Germany, where he encountered a new psychology based on experimentation as well as intellectual analysis. After working as a school principal in California, Wolfe returned to Nebraska to teach courses in philosophy and experimental psychology at the University in Lincoln. Although his tenure was interrupted for several years as the result of an administrative disagreement, he returned to the University to resume his teaching of psychology as a laboratory science. In his last year at the University, Wolfe became caught up in political controversies surrounding World War I, and his modestly successful defense of academic and personal freedom left him exhausted.

One enchanting feature of this book is the mixture of stories reflecting a particular time and place in American education with stories of timeless issues that remain current today. Around the events in Wolfe's life, Benjamin provides a rich background of higher education at the end of the nineteenth century; there are discussions of moral education, development of the students' faculties of reason and judgement, and the application of popular psychology to education. At the same time, there are familiar accounts of criticism of the university by legislators, budget struggles among departments, conflicts between vocational and intellectual education, and media attacks on the undisciplined faculty who allegedly fill students' minds with wild ideas.

An important theme is Wolfe's personal and professional dedication to teaching. Despite requiring many extra hours of laboratory work, his courses were immensely popular. Wolfe believed that students learn from engaging in independent research, and he offered them facilities, support, and ideas to undertake their own studies of psychology. Even his own research included studies of human capacity designed to identify the best possible forms of education. Wolfe knew all the great American psychologists of his time, and he was a charter member of the American Psychological Association. Instead of furthering his own academic career, however, he provided the richest possible experience for students in a small midwestern university, and an unusually large number of them went on to graduate study in the finest psychology Ph.D. programs in the country. Twenty-two of Wolfe's students who became psychologists are described in the appendix. Three of them were elected president of the American Psychological Association.

This is a straightforward chronological narrative, and Benjamin acknowledges that he makes no attempt at extensive interpretation of motive or cause. At times the historical record of events seems a bit detailed, especially when quotations from documents are used. The book, however, reads very well because the story itself needs no elaboration to be absorbing, and Ludy Benjamin's gift is that he recognized a story worth telling. University faculty today still struggle with issues similar to those that confronted Harry Wolfe a century ago, including the role of teaching in the portfolio of a modern academic. Some faculty champion teaching as a legitimate form of scholarship that should be counted for promotion and recognition. Wolfe's story makes a compelling case for simply recognizing great teaching as an important and valuable activity in its own right. **Daniel J. Bernstein**, *Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.

**Groundwater Levels in Nebraska, 1989.** Michael J. Ellis, Gregory V. Steele, and Perry B. Wigley. Lincoln: Conservation and Survey Division, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1990. Maps, charts, and illustrations. viii + 82 pp. \$6.50 paper.

*Groundwater Levels in Nebraska, 1989*, continues the excellent record of Nebraska Water Survey Papers produced by the Conservation and Survey Division and the US Geological Survey. The authors provide full color cartographic displays that are accurate as well as highly readable. Some of the maps treat the state of Nebraska for summary purposes. However, the greater value is found in the nine subregional large scale maps that cover the entire state in detail. Each map clearly displays the