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A Tribute to David H. Pratt

by Gerald Haslam, Ph.D., AG

David Pratt retired effective Fall Semester 2001. Those are words which are hard to believe, as David has been our family history anchor in British research for longer than anyone around here can remember. He is or was our last link with the famous genealogists of yore who have gone on, most of them, to their reward. He retires at a time when Web and Internet sites having to do with family history, numbering over 100,000, are changing the faces of the discipline and the methodology employed.

David attended BYU in the early '60s and took his first genealogy class from Archibald F. Bennett, the Dean of family history studies in the Mormon context. He then became engaged to Beverly Stevenson and started working for Provo City Power, and was about to take a job reading meters when the Research Department of the Genealogical Society of Utah offered him a job which paid \$20 more a month than Provo City did.

A member of the Church's genealogical research team for paying patrons, David started out doing surveys for clients—checking the Temple Index Bureau and the Main Archive Section of the Church Records Archives for family group sheets already completed, in order to avoid duplication of research work. Although he preferred Northeastern States research, he was assigned to do English research under Jerry Powells. Later, he learned more advanced techniques from the fathers of the English research division in the Genealogical Society, Brits David Gardner and Frank Smith. David worked at the Genealogical Society from 1960-1963, subsequently graduated from BYU and became part of the faculty here in 1966.

Members of the BYU genealogical faculty at that time were Archibald Bennett, David Gardner and Vince Jones and—after Jones left—Norman E. Wright. When David Gardner felt he could no longer

continue, David replaced him. Pratt and Wright went on to become the mainstay of the old genealogy B.A. program here from 1963 until the late 1973, later joined by Ben Bloxham and Carl-Erik Johansson. Initially they were put into a college which was a catch-all for esoteric courses, the old tech school which included the nursing and welding programs and ROTC. Why it was arranged that way nobody knew, but David always said it was because if the nurses couldn't save the patient, then at least the genealogists could do his or her temple work!

About 1980, the genealogists were transferred to the History Department. Pratt and Wright felt they weren't reaching enough people in day classes at BYU so they set up a summer seminar where they reached out to the public worldwide and invited them to campus. This was the beginning of the popular Priesthood Genealogy Seminar held once a year in late summer, which continues today as the BYU August Genealogy Seminar. Pratt and Wright also conducted seminars in Canada, California and Arizona, and frequently took American students to England to help them research British ancestry on-site.

David was one of the founders of the Utah Genealogical Association (UGA), serving on the first board of director for several years under his old mentor and UGA's first president Jerry Wells. David went on to publish several books and articles on English research, and is still churning out volumes in his path-breaking *A Guide to English Probate Records* series. He believes that the Center for Family History and Genealogy, established here in November 2000, has staying power, and is excited about the increasing number of students in the genealogy major program (currently about 80). He boasts that at one time at least ten percent of employees at the Family History Library were graduates of the BYU program,

and the former director of library services, David Rencher, is also a graduate of our program.

As David's colleagues and students alike, we will miss him and are grateful to him for all his years of services here at the university.

David, we will miss you!