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THE SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF THE AMERICAS

*** SSILA BULLETIN ***

An Information Service for SSILA Members

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Number 35: May 22, 1996

IN MEMORIAM: MARY R. HAAS

Mary Rosamond Haas, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics in the University of California at Berkeley, died in her home in Berkeley on May 17 after a long, lingering illness. She was eighty-six years old. She is survived by her brother, Robert Haas, and by her stepmother, Dorothy Haas.

Haas was born January 23, 1910 in Richmond, Indiana. Her undergraduate education was acquired at Earlham College in her home town, although she

took a second bachelor's degree--in comparative philology--from the University of Chicago where she first encountered Edward Sapir. She then joined the small band of graduate students whom Sapir trained at Yale in the 1930s, receiving her Ph.D. in 1935. Her dissertation was a grammar of Tunica, a linguistic isolate of Louisiana. In the years immediately following she did field work on various other languages of the Southeast, including Natchez and several Muskogean languages (Creek, Koasati, Choctaw, Alabama, and Hitchiti).

In 1940, as America's entry into the Second World War became imminent, Haas began work on Thai in order to prepare teaching materials for use by the armed forces. In the fall of 1943 she began teaching Thai in the Army Specialized Language Program at Berkeley. This led to a Berkeley appointment as Research Associate and Lecturer in Siamese and Linguistics in the Department of Oriental Languages.

Her appointment to an Assistant Professorship at Berkeley in 1947 marked a significant acceleration of her illustrious career. Together with her colleagues Murray Emeneau, Douglas Chretien, Madison Beeler, and Francis Whitfield, she set into motion a program, funded by the State Legislature, known as the Survey of California Indian Languages which provided resources for sending qualified graduate students to carry out in-depth field studies of the surviving native languages of the state. The Survey started as a pilot project in 1949 with one of Haas' graduate students, William Bright, who studied Karuk in northwestern California. In 1953 the Survey became official and the Graduate Department of Linguistics was established at Berkeley.

During the 1950s and 60s Haas used the Survey to make possible extensive fieldwork on the aboriginal languages of California, and in later years on many other American Indian languages outside California. More than forty dissertations have been written under Survey sponsorship, and numerous careers in linguistics and ethnolinguistics have resulted from the work of Haas and her colleagues. Besides its outstanding merit as an academic enterprise, the Survey has helped ensure the preservation of many Native California languages which would otherwise have been doomed to oblivion.

Haas's achievements were widely recognized. In 1963 she was elected President of the Linguistic Society of America. In 1964 she was appointed a Guggenheim Fellow. In 1974 she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. After her retirement in 1977 she accepted several visiting appointments, both in the United States and abroad.

For her many students Mary Haas will always remain the quintessential scholar, a mentor of breathtaking stature, larger than life.

---William Shipley

A memorial for Mary R. Haas will be held at Berkeley on Friday, June 28, during the first day of the 1996 Hoka-Penutian Conference. For further details, please contact Leanne Hinton, Dept. of Linguistics, UC-Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720 (hinton@violet.berkeley.edu).

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