



Edward Charles Ehrensperger

Dakota Images

Edward Charles Ehrensperger, educator and scholar, was born in 1895 in Indianapolis. He earned three degrees from Harvard, studied three years in Europe, and taught at Northwestern University and Wellesley College before coming to the University of South Dakota in 1932 as professor and head of the English Department. In 1964, he moved to Yankton College to head its English Department, retiring a second time in 1972.

Trained as a scholar in language and literature, Ehrensperger directed most of the graduate theses in the English Department at the university, but his passion was teaching the literary classics to undergraduates. While faddish notions came and went, he insisted on a thorough grounding in the great writers, especially Shakespeare. Always he demanded correctness and excellence from his students. He was concerned with English teaching at all levels and for many years was the main force behind the South Dakota Council of Teachers of English, which he founded in 1941.

In the 1930s, Ehrensperger began to study place names. Heading a team of writers supported by the Work Projects Administration, he published *South Dakota Place Names* (1941). He was a founding member in 1951 of the American Name Society, serving as its president in 1968; for over thirty years, he distributed nationally a summary of research in place names.

Ehrensperger was active in the United Church of Christ, Congregational, in Vermillion and Yankton and on the state level. He wrote and published a brief history of the Vermillion church and was the editor in 1977 of a statewide history of the church.

He was a small, wiry man, always neatly dressed, who impressed everyone, even in his later years, with his boundless energy. His enthusiasm also extended to his hobbies: gardening, stamp collecting, and opera. He and his wife, Helen, had two sons, Charles and Donald. Helen died in 1980. Edward Ehrensperger died on 18 April 1984, a few weeks short of his eighty-ninth birthday.

by THOMAS J. GASQUE

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