

**POSNER, ERNST****(1892, BERLIN, GERMANY – 1980, GERMANY)****FATHER: CARL POSNER****NATIONALITY: GERMAN , U. S. CITIZEN****COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE: GERMANY AND THE U.S.****EDUCATION**

University of Berlin: Ph.D. in philosophy, history and languages, Berlin, Germany, 1920

**AREAS OF ARCHIVAL SPECIALIZATION**

History of archives; archival education; records management; international archives.

**ACHIEVEMENTS IN ARCHIVAL FIELD**

At American University, Washington D.C., Posner helped establish one of the first educational programs for archival training in the United States. He was also instrumental in efforts to capture and preserve archival records and cultural treasures in Axis-occupied territories during and after World War II. Over the course of his career, Posner published seminal works on archival science and history.

**CAREER HISTORY**

- Prussian State Archives, 1920 - 1935
- Editor, Acta Borussica, 1923 - 1935
- Lecturer, Institute for Archival Science and Advanced Historical Studies, 1930 - 1935
- Lecturer, Assistant Professor and then Professor of History and Archives Administration, Chairman of the History Department, Dean of the Graduate School, Director of the School of Social Sciences and Public Affairs, American University, Washington, D. C., 1939 - 1961

**HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY**

Ernst Posner was born in Prussia in 1892 and raised in a Lutheran family with Jewish-Christian ancestry. He joined the German infantry during World War I. Posner was wounded in Poland and fought on both Russian and French fronts, eventually achieving the rank of lieutenant before leaving the army in 1918. He worked in the Prussian state archives for fifteen years before he was forced to resign in 1935, after the Nazi takeover and passage of the Nuremberg laws classifying and discriminating against Jewish citizens of Germany. At this time he was also forced to resign as editor of editing the Acta Borussica and lecturer at the Institute for Archival Science and Advanced Historical Studies. Outcast from the archival profession in his homeland, in 1938 he travelled to the U. S. looking for job prospects, unsuccessful in his search he had to return to Germany. He was arrested that same year in Germany and imprisoned for six weeks at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, until his wife, Kaethe Posner, managed to convince a high-ranking German officer to release him on the basis of his military service during World War I. With the support of Solon Justus Buck (then Assistant Director of

the U. S. National Archives), the American University in Washington, D.C., hired Posner as a lecturer in archival administration in 1939, where he also later worked in the history department, as dean of the Graduate School, and director of the School of Social Sciences and Public Affairs. Posner and his wife could therefore emigrate to the United States in 1939 and they became American citizens in December of 1944. At American University Posner succeeded in establishing an educational program for archival training, which influenced the development of other training programs in the US. He also directed four-week summer institutes at American University that brought students from across America and abroad. Posner was a mentor to Solon Justus Buck, then second 'Archivist of the United States,' as well as the following three Archivists: Wayne C. Grover, Robert Bahmer, and James B. Rhoads. Through his work for the Dinsmore *Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies* and the *Robert Commission* (the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments) among others, Posner supported the policy of capturing enemy records and helped preserve archives and cultural treasures in Axis-occupied territories in 1943 and 1944. After the war he surveyed conditions in German repositories and sought to develop connections between German archivists and professionals in the US and Europe. Posner was also involved in international archival meetings as an American representative and was council member, vice-president and president of the Society of American Archivists. At the International Council on Archives Extraordinary Congress in 1966, Posner contributed to ICA's establishment of a program of archival assistance to developing nations.

#### **PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY LISTING BOOKS AND THEN ARTICLES**

- American State Archives. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1964
- Archives and the Public Interest: Selected Essays. Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1967
- Archives in the Ancient World. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972
- "European Experiences in Training Archivists," in *The American Archivist*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1941
- "Effects of Changes of Sovereignty on Archives" in *The American Archivist*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1942
- Posner, Ernst. "Public Records Under Military Occupation" in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1944
- "The National Archives and the Archival Theorist" in *The American Archivist*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1955
- "What, then, is the American Archivist, this New Man?" in *The American Archivist*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1957
- "Solon Justus Buck: Archivist" in *The American Archivist*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1960
- "Archives in Medieval Islam. *The American Archivist*, vol. 35, no. ¾, 1972

---

#### **AUTHOR OF BIOGRAPHICAL ENTRY/DATE OF SUBMISSION**

Molly Bruce, September 2013

Susanne Belovari, October 2014

#### **SECONDARY SOURCES FOR BIOGRAPHY**

#### **ICA-SUV WHO'S WHO IN ARCHIVES GLOBALLY**

<http://www.library.illinois.edu/ica-suv/index.php>

- Ross, R. A. “Ernst Posner: The Bridge between the Old World and the New” in *The American Archivist*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1981
- Wedgeworth, Robert, ed. *World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services*, ALA 1993

**EDITOR/EDITING DATE**

Susanne Belovari, October 2014