

Eckard V. Toy, Jr.: March 19, 1931—October 7, 2013

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Eckard V. Toy

First and foremost, Eckard Toy was a captivating public speaker, capable of rousing audiences to laughter and joyful tears—as I witnessed in Bellingham, Washington at the Pacific Northwest History Conference in May 1984. When attendees exited a mid-Friday morning session, many of them nosily laughing aloud, I asked about all the commotion. A friend remarked that Eckard Toy had just presented a paper, “Mark Hatfield, Arthur Langlie, and the Prayer Breakfast.” [Arthur Langlie was a puritanical teetotaler and three-term governor of Washington. The younger Hatfield was then one of Oregon’s U. S. Senators and a teetotaler.] The point to this anecdote is to underscore Eckard’s special talents in using irony and humor to explain historical events. He had what many historians lack—a gift for presenting uncomfortable historical episodes in a way that allowed students to see the dark side of American history through off-centered observations. And in the midst of those who attacked unpopular political views, he remained a staunch defender of civil liberties and the right to freedom of expression.

Eckard, who was a visiting professor for much of four years at Oregon State University during the 1980s, excelled in the classroom through his characteristic skill in tracing historical happenings with intelligence and wit. He treated both undergraduate and graduate students with respect, engaging with great interest their research proposals. Eckard had far less patience with pomposity in the historical profession, singling out for censure those who thought too well of themselves. And, at meetings of the Pacific Northwest History Conference, the Western History Association, and other professional gatherings, he was always willing to speak out in his firm, clear voice against

questionable historical judgment. No one ever accused Eckard Toy of being a wilting flower!

“One Hundred Percent Americanism,” hoods, burning crosses, black helicopters, ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government), Christian Identity Movement, nativism/racism, and constitutional militias were terms that appeared frequently in his public speaking and published articles. A specialist in ultraconservative radical right fringe groups, Eckard collected information on their activities through a post office box listed under a pseudonym. He used those documents to reveal the dark, sinister side of the American story, but he would also argue that such groups were not far removed from the American mainstream—the violent racism directed against Oregon’s Indian people, the persecution of the Chinese in the late nineteenth century, the incarceration of Japanese American citizens after Pearl Harbor, or the segregation of Portland’s African Americans during and after World War Two. “War spares few innocents,” he wrote in 2001, “and truth and civil liberties are among its first casualties.”¹

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, Marianne Keddington Lang, editor of the Oregon Historical Quarterly, asked Eckard to offer historical perspective on the recent attacks on the American mainland. He reworked an existing manuscript to incorporate the 9/11 events, and the revised article, “Oregon at War,” was published in the Winter 2001 issue. Before the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Eckard reflected, “the legacies of war are haunting and permanent.” He questioned the wisdom of American participation in overseas ventures—the intangibles—the human cost in lives, disfigurement, and mental wounds. In this—one of his finest essays—Eckard Toy raised devilish questions that we live with still!

¹ Eckard V. Toy, Jr., “Oregon at War,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 102 (2001), 416.