

PJ-9 9-4-1993

OBITUARIES

Elmer M. Blistein dies; was professor at Brown

BLISTEIN,
Elmer

PROVIDENCE — Elmer M. Blistein, 73, of Alumni Avenue, a humorist and emeritus professor of English at Brown University, died at home yesterday. He was the husband of Sophia (Schaffer) Blistein.

Elizabeth Kirk, chairwoman of the department of English, said the cause of death was congestive heart failure.

A native of Pawtucket, Professor Blistein came to Brown as an undergraduate during the week of the Great Hurricane of 1938, and it was said that despite three years of World War II Army service, he never truly left the school after that.

He received his bachelor's degree in 1942, and began teaching there upon discharge from the Army in 1946. He obtained a doctorate in 1953 and continued to teach until 1985.

He taught Shakespeare's complete works, Elizabethan drama and courses on the nature of comedy. He published *Comedy in Action* in 1964, and the book won the SUT award for the best book on comedy published that year.

With Edward A. Bloom and Charles H. Philbrick II he published *The Order of Poetry: An Introduction and The Variety of Poetry: An Anthology*. He edited *The Drama of the Renaissance, Essays for Leister Bradner* and George Peele's *David and Bethsabe*.

He was among a group of conspirators who created Prof. Josiah T. Carberry, the fictitious Brown faculty member who, although frequently listed as attending various functions through the years, never quite seemed able to show up.

In the fall of 1974, three students approached Professor Blistein for a group study course on Sherlock Holmes, a proposal that Brown's famous New Curriculum encouraged by way of freedom of exploration and study. The proposal was accepted as a semester course in the English department, the first of its

kind in the history of Brown.

"His classes were both instructive and warmly human. One day, according to the Brown Alumni Monthly, a student blushed in embarrassment after she made a mistake in a recitation. "Don't be upset," Professor Blistein said. "We all make mistakes. I've even made a few myself. There was one in 1937, another in 1946, and one in late 1963."

Professor Blistein was a guiding force behind the Friends of the Brown University Library, a trustee of the Providence Public Library, president and chairman of the library committee of the Providence Athenaeum, and a corporation member of the Robert Beverly Hale Library.

He also served as a trustee of Women & Infants Hospital, a member of the Pawtucket School Committee and a corporation member of the Rhode Island Youth Guidance Clinic, and was president, vice president, secretary and historian of the Rhode Island Alpha of Phi Beta Kappa. He was president of the Brown Faculty Club.

Professor Blistein said he was proudest of his frequent appearances as a public school teacher in elementary and secondary schools.

Former student Philip Hayes of the Brown University Library. Class of 1953, endowed the Elmer Blistein House as the center of the graduate program in creative writing. Kenneth Grief, Class of 1957, endowed a prize in honor of the professor for the best senior student in Shakespeare studies.

Besides his wife, he leaves two sons, Adam Dara Blistein of Philadelphia and David Schaffer Blistein of Brattleboro, Vt.; two sisters, Sybil Kern of Pawtucket and Lillian Cutler of Weymouth, Mass., and three grandchildren.

The funeral service will be held Monday at 11 a.m. at Temple Beth-El, 70 Orchard Ave. Burial will be in Swan Point Cemetery.

BLISTEIN, Professor Elmer M.

September 3, 1993. Residence 99 Alumni Ave., Providence. Beloved husband of Sophia (Schaffer) Blistein. Dearest father of Adam Dara (Maralin) Blistein of Philadelphia, PA and David Schaffer (Wendy) Blistein of Brattleboro, VT. Devoted brother of Sybil Blistein (Dr. Arthur B.) Kern of Pawtucket and Lillian Blistein (the late Henry) Cutler of Weymouth, MA. Dearest grandfather of Emily Drake Blistein, Jonathan Philip, Blistein and Lenna Rebecca Blistein. Funeral services will be held Monday at 11 a.m. at TEMPLE BETH EL, 70 Orchard Ave., Providence. In lieu of flowers contributions in his memory may be made to The Sophia Schaffer and Elmer M. Blistein Book Fund, c/o the Library at Brown University or The Providence Athenaeum or Hospice Care of RI, 169 George St., Providence, RI 02906. Arrangements by MAX SUGAR, RIAL CHAPLAIN, 100 St. (corner of Providence.

Professor of English
(Emeritus)
Elmer M. Blistein
1920-1993

Professor Emeritus Elmer

Blistein '42, '53 Ph.D.,

whose colorful wit made

him one of the English department's most memorable teacher/

scholars, died on September 3 at his home in Providence. The

cause of death was congestive heart failure.

He retired from teaching in 1985 but continued to be active

in University affairs, including his involvement with the Friends

of the Brown University Library.

A specialist in Elizabethan drama and comedy, Professor

Blistein taught the complete works of Shakespeare and devel-

oped a popular course on Sherlock Holmes. He was among the

"coconspirators" who kept alive and added to the Josiah Car-

berry myth through the years.

Professor Blistein is survived by his wife, Sophie Schaffer

Blistein '41, 99 Alumni Avenue, Providence 02906; and two sons.

A longer article on Professor Blistein and his career will

appear in the November issue.

