

Philip Francis Wooby, (1922-2017): The First African American in the School of Classical Studies and Archaeology at the American Academy in Rome

Born in Philadelphia, Wooby was part of an African American family with strong ties to the Catholic Church. This heritage along with his early education at Philadelphia's Roman Catholic High School and with the Society of the Divine Word in Techny, IL shaped his undergraduate work at St. John's University in Collegeville, MN. Ranking among the top students, he was chosen to present the valedictory address to the class of 1945. After a short time as a novice at St. John's Abbey, Wooby left to earn his M.A. in Classical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 1948 (n.a., 1948). After teaching at various schools in Philadelphia and North Carolina he matriculated at Harvard University, and while working for Werner Jaeger won a Prix de Rome in March, 1951 (n.a., *NYT* 1951). While black people had been named Academy fellows in other fields (e.g. Ulysses Kay, FAAR in musical composition and John W. Rhoden, FAAR in visual arts), no person of African origin had won in the area of classical studies and architecture before Wooby. (Cole, 1995; Costanzo, 2015).

In the early 1950s he joined Howard University's classics department as an instructor. In 1956 he and the department members, Frank Snowden, Jr., Annette Eaton and Sylvia Gerber, were made honorary members of Eta Sigma Phi at the inaugural meeting of Howard's new Gamma Xi chapter. (n.a., 1956). Wooby's first book on a classical subject was his translation of Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* (New York, 1973). In the book's introduction he expressed "sincerest thanks to Professor William C. McDermott of the Dept. of Classical Studies of the University of Pennsylvania." A few reviewers of the book found some merit in Wooby's

translation, but others found none. (Smith 1974; Verity 1974; Rice 1975; Kaimowitz 1975; Fantazzi 1976).

Wooby was very active in his classroom. At Canisius College he oversaw the Catullan Club and as advisor to the college's Eta Sigma Phi chapter, Delta Beta, helped host Eta Sigma Phi's 38<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in Buffalo, NY. In 1968, Professor Wooby became the first Black man to be hired onto the faculty at Millersville State College (now Millersville University). In 1969 he established and then advised the Millersville Classics Club until his retirement. Under his guidance, the club performed various comedies by Plautus in translation. He also worked with Dr. Rudolph Masciantonio and in 1981 taught for the Philadelphia School District's NEH-Funded program "Language Arts Through Latin." (Masciantonio 1981).

His former students at Millersville including Timothy Moore, Bruce B. Speck, and Michael Katchmer fondly remember him and the cast parties that Wooby and his wife, Amelia Reed Beck, who was of Caucasian descent, hosted. Interracial alliances such as his and Amelia's were and are still unusual, but even more unusual at the time were the two faculty positions in classics that Wooby had held at majority white institutions. Wooby was in fact in the vanguard of the African American professoriate who were no longer compelled by segregation to restrict their careers to the campuses of historically black institutions. Black classicists from earlier times such as William Sanders Scarborough (whose white wife, Sarah Cordelia Bierce Scarborough, taught alongside him at Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, OH for 43 years) had no such options. This paper illustrated by a set of slides will make us familiar with Wooby's career in classics.

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n.a., "Among the Chapters," *The Nuntius* 31(November, 1956): 6.

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