BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Francis A. March, the first to hold the title Professor of English Language and Literature anywhere in the United States or Europe, was born on October 25, 1825, in Sutton (now Millbury), Worcester County, MA. March was educated in the Worcester public school system and at Amherst College. He graduated from college in 1845 as valedictorian and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1848, he was granted an M.A. from Amherst with an oration on “Relation of the Study of Jurisprudence to the Baconian Philosophy.” March was admitted to the New York bar in 1850. In 1852, ill health forced him to leave the New York City law firm he had established with Gordon L. Ford. Eventually, he left the practice of law and accepted a position to teach law in Fredericksburg, VA, where he worked from 1852 to 1855.

On August 12, 1860, March married Margaret Mildred Stone Conway (1837-1911). The couple had nine children, including Francis Andrew March (1863-1928), also a Lafayette English professor; Peyton Conway March (1864-1955), U.S. army general and chief of staff; Thomas Stone March, superintendent of schools in Greensburg, PA; Alden March, Sunday editor of The New York Times; and John Lewis March, professor of modern languages at Union College, Schenectady, NY. Following a fall, a broken hip, and the death of his wife, March died on September 9, 1911.

From 1855 to 1906, March was on the Faculty of Lafayette College. When he was 30, he was appointed tutor; in 1857, he became Professor of the English Language and Lecturer in Comparative Philology. As described in the Skillman biography of the College, the appointment was “the greatest pioneering step ever made in the realm of scholarship by Lafayette College. It gave to Lafayette the honor and distinction of being the first college in America to establish a chair for the extended and systematic study of the English language in the English classics in the light of modern philology” (Skillman I 228). March’s innovation was, quite simply, to teach not only Greek and Latin texts but English texts as well. During his 50-year career at Lafayette, March received honorary degrees from Princeton (1870 and 1896), Amherst (1871), Columbia (1887), Cambridge (1896), and Oxford (1896).

March published A Comparative Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Language (1870), A Thesaurus Dictionary of the English Language (1903), and four volumes of Greek and Latin classics as well as more than 200 articles in philology, the historical study of grammar, lexicography, spelling reform, the teaching of literature, and pedagogy. He served as director of American readers for the Oxford English Dictionary and helped create the Standard Dictionary (1893-95). An entry on March has appeared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica since 1910. March was president of the Modern Language Association from 1891-93, president of the American Philological Association (1873-74 and 1895-96) and the Spelling Reform Association (1876-1905), vice-president of the new Shakespeare Society (London), and the first American member of the Philosophical Society (London) and L’Association Fonetique de Professeurs de Langues Vivants (Paris). The Association of Departments of English division of the MLA presents an annual
award in his name to an eminent scholar-teacher. At Lafayette, an endowed chair in English in
his name was proposed as early as 1879 and established in 1906.
March is remembered by Richard N. Hart in Francis Andrew March: A Sketch, the “Grand Old
Man” of Lafayette College (1907) and by William Baxter Owen in The Humanities in the
Education of the Future (1912). Owen (1843-1917), also a professor at Lafayette, was one of
March’s students. An overview of March’s life and writings may be found in Paul and June
Schlueter’s introduction to Francis A. March: Selected Writings of the First Professor of English
(2005); the volume reprints approximately 30 of March’s essays and contains an extensive
bibliography of March’s writings.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Francis A. March Collection (1 record center box; ¾ cubic feet) contains original manuscript
and research materials as follows:

The March original manuscripts are in one folder. Of special interest is a letter dated June 21,
1887, from March to James A. H. Murray (#9 below), in which March, head of the American
reading program for the Oxford English Dictionary, reports to Murray, primary editor, on a list
of special quotations compiled by J. Hammond Trumbull. Also of special interest is a listing of
the distribution of some 150 contributors to the OED (#13 below).

The March research materials, in 10 folders, includes four folders containing copies of some 120
of March’s essays.

INVENTORY

Box 1
Original manuscripts
1. Form filled out for Who’s Who?
2. Letter from Henry Sweet to A. J. Ellis, undated
3. Letter to J. H. Trumbull dated February 7, 1878
4. Letter from W. W. Skeat dated April 6, 1878 (also typescript)
5. Letter to W. W. Skeat dated April 22, 1878 (also typescript)
6. Letter from W. W. Skeat dated May 6, 1878
7. Letter to Mildred S. Conway dated January 1858
8. Letter from John Hancock dated April 30, 1879
10. Letter to W. B. Pitman, undated
11. Summary of paper given by March on the Historical English Dictionary, undated
12. Summary of paper given by March on “Some Points in Anglo-Saxon Phonology,”
    undated
13. Tally of 150 workers examining 1,008 books written by 333 authors, undated
14. Page proof removed from American Philosophical Association Proceedings, July 1893,
    Appendix (see also Laf. Coll. Y M315X No. 3 for a photocopy of another document with
    March’s proofmarks)
Research materials
1. Essays by March dated 1859, 1860s
2. Essays by March dated 1870s
3. Essays by March dated 1880s
4. Essays by March dated 1890s
5. Bibliographies of writings by and about March
6. Biographies of March
7. Essays about March: reminiscences and memorials
8. Essays citing March
9. Essays about the study of English in March’s time
10. Correspondence, etc. re Schlueter edition of March essays

Note: Items available in Lafayette College’s Special Collections shelved prior to October 2015 may be found in the online catalogue.

APPENDIX

Essays by March


1881 [“Tribute to Henry Boynton Smith”]. In *Henry Boynton Smith: His Life and Work*, ed. by His Wife [Elizabeth Lee [Allen] Smith]. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1881, pp. 151-54. [a letter from March; also, March is mentioned on pp. 162 and 379]

1881 “An Address at the Reopening of Pardee Hall, Lafayette College, November 30, 1880.” Easton, PA: Printed by Order of the Board of Trustees, 1881, pp. 3-16.* In Schlueter, 211-21.


1884 Review of *Ogilvie’s Imperial Dictionary*. *The Independent* April 17, 1884, p. 11.

1884 [“Speech to Teachers of the Academy”]. In *The Centenary of Leicester Academy Held September 4, 1884 ...* Worcester, MA: Charles Hamilton, 1884, pp. 81-82.


1886 “Ten Years of Spelling Reform.” *Bulletin of the Spelling Reform Association* No. 22 (September 1886): 45-56.* In Schlueter, 120-29.
1886  “List of Amended Spellings Recommended by the Philological Society of London and the American Philological Association. Transactions of the American Philological Association 17 (1886): 127-49.**
1887  “Annual Address of the President of the Philological Association, 1874.” Spelling: A Magazine Devoted to the Simplification of English Orthography 1.2 (July 1887): 93-95.*


1892 Review of Ethical Teachings in Old English Literature, by T. W. Hunt. The Independent May 12, 1892, p. 17.


1893 “Recollections of Language Teaching.” President’s Address, Modern Language Association, December 29, 1892. PMLA 8 (1893): xix-xxii.

1893 “The Relation of English Literature to Aesthetics.” Proceedings of the College English Association of the Middle States and Maryland 1892, pp. 31-35. In Schlueter, 139-43.


1895 “Phonetic Spelling.” Letter to the Editor. Languages: An International Journal for Linguistics, Philologers, Students, etc. 3.2 (February 15, 1895): 32.


Note: These files contain copies of all of the listed essays. In some cases, there is also a copy in Special Collections or in the Schlueter edition:

* = On faculty shelf in Special Collections.
** = In *Addresses, reprints, etc. by Francis Andrew March, 1861-1893*, on faculty shelf in Special Collections, Y 315ad.


Prefaces and Introductions to March’s own books are not included in this listing of essays.

This list is not comprehensive. See Bibliography file for additional listings.

Prepared by June Schlueter
October 2015