

# Civil Rights, Civil Liberties

Made possible by the gift of Madge and Val Lorwin, the inaugural Lorwin Lectureship will focus on Women's Rights in a Global World. But who were the Lorwins? A conversation with UO history professor George Sheridan.



UO history professor Val Lorwin (UO Libraries Special Collections, circa 1960.)

**Q: You taught in the same department as Val Lorwin. How well did you know Val and Madge Lorwin?**

Val interviewed me. I am Val's successor in his job. I went there in 1976. I moved into their place, I think it was 1978. And then I stayed there until I got married, which was in 1986. So I was there through all that time.

**Q: You were living there when he died?**

Yes, I was there in 1982, and I would always go check in on Madge and everything afterwards.

**Q: Was Val Lorwin something of a mentor to you?**

In every sense he was. He passed along anything he came across that he thought would be of interest to me. In fact it was usually much more than I could handle, because he was such a bubbly, active figure. His mind just couldn't sit still. He'd come across something, and he would show me this. And they invited me over to their house all the time. The first year I was here—this was the test case—they asked if I would housesit for them when they went to Europe, and this was for the whole spring term. I did such an impeccable job in Madge's book—that means there was not even the tiniest little spot

human being, but his mind worked too fast, and he would give information. But for graduate students, they adored him. He would have seminars at his house; now, maybe there were undergraduates there, too. And Madge would serve food. The memories that students would carry away with them would be a Madge and Val memory. And I'm sure he was so stimulating, and so engaging—he loved to engage in conversation—so with graduate students it was off the charts.

He was a mentor to a number of them who then went on; and you know, the proof is in the pudding there, because there would be former graduate students who had taken classes from him thirty and forty years previously who would call the history department, and ask, Did they know if he had died? Or they would call and check in on Madge. When I went to conferences, one former student that I particularly remember would talk very effusively about them.

**Q: Val's area of expertise was labor, French labor?**

My whole course schedule was created by him, and it remains largely that. French history, modern French history, which is to say the history from the French revolution to the present; European economic

history, all European economic history going back to the Middle Ages; comparative labor movement; and labor history. Those were actually his teaching areas; his research area—the big one as you suggest—was mainly the twentieth century French labor movement, which really is his only book-length study. But his other big area of research, where he really made a name for himself, was in the study of small democracies in Europe, and particularly an understanding of pluralism both in the political sense and in a social, cultural sense. He became a spe-

cialist in the Low Countries—Belgium and The Netherlands. He was given the award of the Order of Leopold, 1969, by the King of Belgium for his work on Belgian democracy.

In terms of his expertise, he was also identified as a social science historian and was interested in the application of history to social science questions. A book that he coedited on the use of quantitative methods in history was a big thing at the time, since gone by the wayside [*The Dimensions of the Past: Materials, Problems, and Opportunities for Quantitative Work in History*, edited by Val R. Lorwin and Jacob M. Price, Yale University Press, 1972]. He was extremely active in the profession, invited to grand international conferences on Lake

Como. And he was connected, not just in the world of history, but broadly in the whole realm

with social scientists, political scientists, sociologists, economists.

**Q: His *New York Times* obituary said he was an eclectic scholar, considered part of all these disciplines... and his book *The French Labor Movement* seems, from what I can gather, still a standard in the field.**

Yes, it's very traditional, centered on the union movement, the issues pertaining to the relationship of government to labor questions. It's deeply researched, very authoritative in that sense, but it is

**"There is said to be a great deal of fear along the Potomac, but I can testify it has not taken over the city." —Val Lorwin (*Time* magazine, June 7, 1954—after four years of persecution by Senator Joseph McCarthy).**

on the stove or anything—that I was recruited to be their tenant once they acquired that little property next door.

**Q: Do you know what kind of reputation Val Lorwin had as a teacher?**

His reputation as a teacher was off the charts for graduate students; I really don't know anything about his reputation as an undergraduate teacher. Just knowing him, and the way that he approached things, I would expect that it wouldn't be particularly their cup of tea. He was a real scholar, he was so warm and a nice

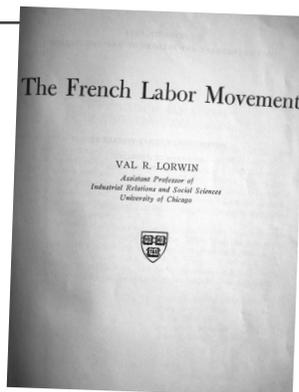
## Accused by McCarthy

Val Lorwin was an expert on the French labor movement and a professor of economic history at the University of Oregon from 1957 until he retired in 1973. Madge Lorwin authored an Elizabethan cookbook. And when they were young and full of the kind of enthusiasm that wants to make the world a better place, they joined the Socialist Party and threw themselves into labor organizing.

The son of eminent labor economist Lewis L. Lorwin, Val worked for several government New Deal agencies, helped edit the Taft presidential papers, served in Europe with the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, and went to work for the U.S. Department of State in 1946. He helped develop the economic groundwork for the Marshall Plan.

And then, he ran afoul of Senator Joseph McCarthy. A former housemate denounced him as a Communist. Lorwin was quoted in a *Time* magazine article as saying: "I happen to have years of rather cantankerous anti-Communist activity on my record long before it became fashionable to be anti-Communist."

He was at first an anonymous case, #54 of the original list of 81 State Department "security cases" accused by McCarthy of being a Communist spy. He was the only one of the original 81 ever prosecuted. Cleared by the State Department Loyalty Board, Lorwin was later indicted by a federal grand jury and accused of committing perjury, an indictment that was finally



Inside title page, *The French Labor Movement*, by Val R. Lorwin (Harvard University Press, 1954).

thrown out. The fight went on for four years. Lorwin later said he felt like the grueling ordeal had taken away several years of his and Madge's lives, and that he was "thankful" that they did not have children.

Val Lorwin briefly returned to work at the State Department after clearing his name. He then went back to graduate school, completing his Ph.D. at Cornell. He taught at the University of Chicago before moving to the University of Oregon. He was a 1966 Guggenheim Fellow.

In his *New York Times* obituary of December 1982, Val Lorwin was described as an "eclectic academic who had been accepted as one of their own by historians, economists, political scientists and sociologists."

### References:

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~lillsie/McCarthyism/Victims.html>

*New York Times* (Dec. 11, 1982) Val R. Lorwin, Ex-Professor and Expert on French Labor, an obituary by Robert McG. Thomas Jr.

*Time* (June 7, 1954) National Affairs: Case No. 54, from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,806840,00.html>

Val Lorwin obituary by Stanley Pierson, professor, UO Department of History, December 1982.

an institutional labor history, which is now kind of old hat. Labor history right now, particularly twentieth century labor history, practically doesn't exist. I mean, it's sad, it's sad. It was a book that was inspired by a real dedication to workers, and in other words within the context of social classes and their politics, that interest is gone. I'm not saying that people don't study work, but even students now, when they tell their fellow students they're taking a course from me on workers, they say, What a boring topic.

**Q: Their involvement in the labor movement in the thirties was something I came across on the Internet. They joined the Socialist Party, got involved with an anti-Communist union—Southern Tenant Farmers Union, so that was one of the ironies of Senator Joseph McCarthy later accusing Val of being a Communist. Did Val ever talk about what happened to him during the McCarthy era?**

Never. He never brought up the McCarthy era. Never did I see the slightest instance of resentment or bad-mouthing of that period. I must say, I heard more bad-mouthing, not about him specifically, but about that era, from other people who did not [have direct involvement].

**Q: What do you make of that?**

I quite honestly do not read it as a denial. Because I would think that I might have

seen indirectly some signs of that. And there is something that I can make of that. Val was a strong anti-Communist. He was a socialist, at heart. Which in America means you vote Democratic. He would have been, for his times, on the left wing of the Democratic Party. But a truly loyal Democrat. Obviously, he was loyal to the state. He was part of the liberation of France. There was a story that he would tell his friends, about how they went through this little village. The first thing they were greeted by was one of the French peasants, who said, complaining to him not about the Nazis but the liberators: "The Nazis paid us more for our eggs."

**Q: If UO didn't sell the house, I understand that Madge Lorwin's first choice was to have the property used for daycare for children of students and faculty.**

Yes, that was very representative of the way both of them thought... something that would be of service in some ways. I was their tenant for many years. We called it the Lorwin Estate. And I have to say quite honestly, when I saw what they did to that property, my heart dropped. The house itself was built in a way that would suit both their needs, their interests, but also in some ways their values. And then when they bought the place next door, they put their heart and soul into restoring them. The whole thing was

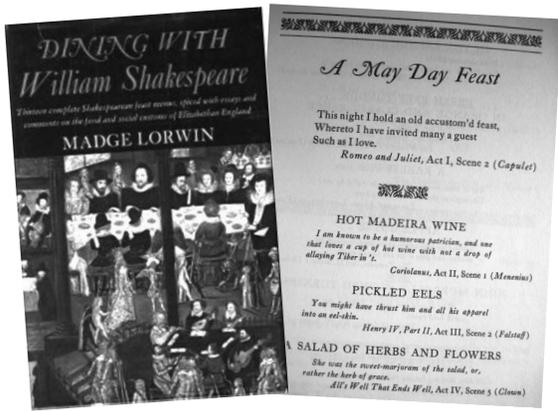
with the idea of service, and I actually was a formal witness to the legal document in which they basically gave the estate over to the university, with the intention of that. When I went back [and looked at the property], the whole thing's completely gone, it's completely erased, in a physical sense, from history. And what has now replaced it is an apartment building like any other; it's decent, it's modern, but it's a purely commercial enterprise. My heart dropped because I knew them, I was attentive; I saw the care, and the attention. And the backyard was a beautiful garden really tended with loving care. And when I saw that, of course this happens all over the world, but, I even wondered how the university managed to get out of that will.\*

**Q: Where was their property?**

On 15th Street, right across from Central Presbyterian Church. And 526 was the number of mine, and I think theirs was

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\* Editor's Note: By the time Madge Lorwin died, the UO had already built the Vivian Olum Child Development Center. According to a UO development officer, Madge had realized that there was no longer the same need for a daycare center, and she was very happy with the idea that her estate distribution would be used for a lectureship on civil rights and civil liberties.



Bookcover and inside page of *Dining with William Shakespeare* (Marge Lorwin, Atheneum, 1976).

550, but the whole property has been taken over.

**Q: I discovered that Madge Lorwin had a great interest in gourmet cooking and in Shakespeare, which prompted her to put together a collection of recipes for full-fledged feasts from the era, culminating in the book *Dining with William Shakespeare*. I read that Val helped her research it after he retired. Could you tell me about Madge Lorwin's interest in Shakespeare?**

Madge, she loved to put on grand shows. Every year she organized a Shakespearean dinner. It was held in their house and had these huge tables spread; every item of food was Shakespearean. She had young girls dressed up in Shakespearean costumes serving the dinners, and it was an absolutely spectacular event. It took a tremendous amount of planning; it was staged, as well as the cooking and everything. I went there probably on more than one occasion. I'm sure it was a fundraiser for something, because that would be typically them.

**Q: What was the house like? It sounds like it must have been very grand in order to contain these dinners.**

I'll give you some highlights. For some people, the house was a little odd, because in some ways it was a bit too organized. It was functional and had a kind of simple, almost austere Scandinavian aesthetic to it. You entered the doorway, and there was a table in front with flowers on it. Immediately to the left was what they called the guestroom, but it also served as Madge's own little study. A narrow hallway went down the left side, and off the hallway were one or two bedrooms, and then a bathroom at the end. On the right was a storage area, but always impeccably neat.

The joke about Madge is that she would dust things off herself and then bring in a housekeeper, or she would bring in the housekeeper and go around and correct what the housekeeper did.

And then it led straight into the kitchen. Now the kitchen was one of the magic rooms of that house. And Madge accumulated kitchenware of the highest quality, and everything was well-organized. Off to the side of the kitchen was a little breakfast room, and then out the back door you entered onto this wonderful little garden. And from the kitchen you could look out on the garden, too. This was on the left-hand side, and as you came into the front if you looked right, it opened into the living room, which was huge.

On the side of the living room, where you entered, facing the front, there was a big, old phonograph and radio. They were passionate about music, classical music. On the left wall was a huge, floor-to-ceiling built-in bookcase, filled with their books. When I went there to work with Madge on the estate, the books part of it, that's where I did a lot of work, working on that section. So you've got on the one hand the books, on the other hand the music, but it was a very big space, and it wasn't cluttered at all. It was so European in many ways, made not for relaxing, but for visiting.

That opened to the dining room. Whenever you were invited to dinner with a small group of people, the dinner table was there. And on the walls were nice oil paintings they had collected in Europe. Every year in that dining room Madge displayed the little gingerbread castle she made. It was very elaborate, and it would be there from maybe Thanksgiving to mid-December. She would donate it to the library for use at Christmastime.

Because there was no wall between the living and dining rooms, it could open up into a huge place where Madge did her Shakespeare thing. Toward the back of the dining room—and for a scholar this is something really special—was Val's study. First of all, the window looked out onto the garden. So both Madge in her kitchen and Val in his study could both look out on this beautiful garden. And Val's study had on both walls, floor to ceiling, bookcases, and books. There was a little bed where he could take a nap. And it was a scholar's dream, because it was a big room, and you could spread

out, which is what you need to do when you're a scholar.

And I can't forget what was always a fixture in their house, and that was the cat. There was always no more than one cat. I'm sure it was the same cat that I knew when I met them, and it's kind of strange, because it died the same week that Val died.

So the whole layout was all on one floor, and it was very rational. I never thought to apply that word. But it was rational, and it had a refined, simple, and no frills taste to it.

**Q: We talked about how Madge's first wish was for the house to be a daycare center. And you were saying that was very appropriate.**

It was obvious that it would have been of service. That's part of what would have been their thinking. It's close to walking distance to campus, so it would have been a perfect location. This is my guess.

Part of my thinking is that when they were gone, this place in which they had put so much of their thought and heart and soul would be continued to be filled with the human community. So it wasn't just a functional service, but the place would remain alive. If you looked at it physically, it was perfectly designed for that. You could make a big open space for the kids to do their games and everything, and you have the kitchen for cooking, and it would have been perfect.

**Q: They didn't have children?**

They didn't have children, but they loved children. After Val passed away, Madge became involved with a group of young kids, a daycare kind of thing. I'll never forget when she said this, my recollection of it is, this warmed her heart. She said, one of these little kids came up to her and called her Grandma. I never heard them say in any way they had any regrets or anything, but she loved kids.

**Q: Would all the funds for the Lorwin Lectureship have come from the sale of the house, or did they also have savings?**

They would have had funds. One thing about them is they were careful savers. They did two things: they saved a lot, and they gave away a lot of money to charities. The one thing they didn't do is spend on themselves.

**Q: Did you see them as philanthropists?**

They really were. They were philanthro-

pists according to their means. They were not super wealthy. But they gave to many causes on a regular basis, and if there were an individual who needed something, who came to their door and needed food, or whatever. Both of them were such givers in every way... they gave of their time, they gave of their personal involvement and commitment with individuals as well as groups.

**Q: And do you know some of the causes they would have given to?**

ACLU... I wouldn't be surprised if they gave to NOW. They would have given to NGOs dealing with development issues. Civil rights was their big thing; I bet you they gave money to the Negro College Fund, to African American causes. Because the African American issue was a big issue, social justice, a big issue. I'm sure they gave some money to foundations that dealt with labor issues, or labor movement or something of that sort. I guess the themes that I would put down are: civil rights, and particularly ACLU-type things; African American; women; and international development, economic development. And also I should add, environmental, particularly like the Sierra Club.

**Q: You said women, so what kind of women's issues?**

Of course women's issues were changing during their lifetimes; they would have begun with, things mainly having to do with justice at work, equality in the workplace kind of thing. Labor things. I know they were very supportive of abortion rights. Did you pick up anywhere that Madge worked for the Social Security Administration?

**Q: No, that wasn't in her obituary... when would that have been?**

Of course Social Security was established in the thirties, and I had the impression it was almost right from the beginning. So it would have been maybe late thirties, 1940s. It was something she was very proud of, too, very much identified with.

**Q: Do you know what she did?**



Madge and Val Lorwin watch a tea ceremony being performed in their living room, circa 1981 (photo courtesy of George Sheridan)

other hand she was the sweetest, just sweet, affectionate.

**Q: Madge died in 2003. She lived a lot longer than Val, so you would have known her another twenty years.**

Yes, but you know, her personality never changed. The sad thing was, she had Alzheimer's eventually, and she would say, "I think I know you, but..." That was hard.

It was not a high administrative position; I would call it a functionary. She wasn't a secretary; but it was not a major position.

**Q: Do you have any other stories you want to talk about in relation to them? Can you think of something that we haven't touched upon?**

The reputation of Madge... I'll just tell it to you; it's not anything to be ashamed of. Madge scared people, because Madge was very direct. She would not hold back on her opinion. And she would direct it toward you. They were not at all religious people, no way, but they were not anti-religious. I would go to church on Sunday, and of course this is Eugene. And I would be dressed like this [khakis and button-up shirt]. I was their tenant, and I would come back and check in and say hello. And I would say, "I'm just coming back from church." She'd say: "Dressed like that?"

The other side of Madge was... there is a part of me that really feels a whole lot more affectionate toward Madge. I liked Val, but Val and I were academics, and we related as academics. Madge was somebody that I really got to feel very close to, and I learned how to deal with the punches. And the other side of Madge, which I saw so often, was this sweet, sweet person. And the sweetness would come in maybe a reaction to the beauty of a flower, or her reaction to her cat and its habits; or she would tell me some story about someone that she encountered... so there's this mix of... in some ways she was a sort of hard driver about things being right, but on the

**Q: She lived to be 96. Was it really late in life that the Alzheimer's showed up?**

Probably the last ten years of her life.

**Q: The estate going to the university, was that decided by both of them? It wasn't Madge deciding this would all go to the university?**

No, it was a hundred percent both. I signed the will.

**Q: You signed the will before Val died; it would have been 1980 maybe?**

That's a good guess, because I was living next door to them; so it would have been 1979-80 probably.

**Q: Would you describe Madge as a feminist?**

I would definitely call her a feminist. I would call him a feminist. In fact, I would call him ... the word feminist, in some ways, thinking of the political aspect, it's really Val. And Madge, feminist only in the sense that she agrees with the feminist agenda. But Val was very committed; he would tack his name on the wall as a feminist. ■

—Alice Evans interviewed George Sheridan in June 2010.

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**Editor's Note: The Lorwin Lectureship on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties is a bequest of the UO College of Arts and Sciences and UO School of Law. CSWS presents the inaugural series, Women's Rights in a Global World.**