John W. Nash

Emeritus Professor of History John W. Nash died on December 21, 1987, at the age of 91. Most of his life was entwined with Wisconsin and its university. Wisconsin born and bred, he was an undergraduate in Madison, and received his doctorate in English history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1922. After holding positions at the University of Montana, Syracuse University, and Knox College, Nash came to the Milwaukee State Teachers College in 1930. Here in Milwaukee he was to spend the rest of his career. In the next quarter of a century, he became a teacher of great enthusiasms and often passionately expressed opinions. He gave no tightly organized little lectures, with thought and facts set out in convenient packages. He introduced his students to a world of books, to a world of learning, and to a world in which they had to think for themselves. The broad humaneness shaped by his extensive reading and by his love for his own state enriched his sense of history and endeared him to generations of Milwaukee students.

Nash was no ivory tower historian. He was active in local Pewaukee affairs, had broad political interests, and in 1944 ran for Congress in his own area on the Democratic ticket. John Nash always felt a sense of responsibility for the community beyond the university.
Nash was at his best in the years following the creation of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1956. He had no difficulty in adjusting to the completely different circumstances that came with the effort to create a university of quality in Milwaukee. He was chairman of the new Department of History from 1956 to 1960, and he threw himself with vigor into the task of creating a first-class department. He was always urging expansion, was enthusiastic to hire those who would irrevocably change the state college he had known, and was always willing to give encouragement and support to his younger colleagues. He was neither quiet nor patient, and he did not suffer fools gladly, but he was not petty. He argued forcefully and loudly for what he thought was right.

On his retirement in 1967 Nash returned to Pewaukee, and spent his last years with his wife Georgia. She survives him.

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