

Rankin, Robert Stanley ^[1]

Rankin, Robert Stanley

by [C. Sylvester Green](#) ^[2], 1994

17 Nov. 1899–4 June 1976

Robert Stanley Rankin, political science educator, was born in Tusculum, Tenn., the son of Thomas Samuel and Mary Isabel Coile Rankin. During [World War I](#) ^[3] he served briefly as a sergeant. He was graduated from [Tusculum College](#) ^[4] in 1920 and received a master of arts degree (1922) and a doctorate (1924) from [Princeton University](#) ^[5]. Between 1924 and 1927 he taught history and political science at Tusculum College after which he joined the faculty of [Duke University](#) ^[6], where he remained until his death. Rankin became a full professor in 1934 and taught until his retirement in 1969. He was assistant dean of the graduate school (1929–36), acting dean (1935–36), and chairman of the Department of Political Science (1949–64). His professional and teaching specialties were American constitutional law, political institutions at the state and local levels, and, in his later years, civil liberties. At various times he was visiting professor at [Alabama](#) ^[7], [Stanford](#) ^[8], and [Columbia universities](#) ^[9], and at [Wake Forest College](#) ^[10]. In 1950 Tusculum College awarded him the honorary doctor of laws degree.

Rankin was one of the founders of the [Southern Political Science Association](#) ^[11] and was its president in 1931. He served for a time as book review editor of the *Journal of Politics* and on the executive council of the American Political Science Association. He participated in college basketball, tennis, and track; tennis, however, remained his athletic hobby, and in the early 1930s he won the tennis championship of [Durham](#) ^[12]. At Duke he sat on the Athletic Council and was chairman of the Atlantic Coast Conference. In recognition of his contributions to collegiate athletics, the P. H. Hanes Foundation gave \$25,000 in his honor to the Duke Athletic Fund.

He served on the Duke Library board and the academic council, and he headed the campus lecture committee for many years, including the centennial emphasis in 1938–39. By vote of the student body in 1969 he was named Outstanding Professor and commended for his "contributions to Duke University and to its student body, both inside and outside the classroom." An accomplished pianist, Rankin prepared more than three dozen original musical arrangements on various themes. Two of these were recorded for playing on a music box he had manufactured in Switzerland. He also collected and studied maps and worked double acrostics.

Having attracted the attention of national and state business leaders, he was appointed a member of the National Arbitration Panel in 1944. Two years later he was a guest of Princeton University for its bicentennial conference on "The Evolution of Social Institutions in America." In 1947 he was invited to formulate a new program of government for the District of Columbia, in 1949 he was project director for the Connecticut Commission on State Government, and in 1954 he headed a comprehensive state government study in South Carolina. From 1958 Rankin was a consultant to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and in 1960 President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed him one of the six members of this commission, on which he served until his death. After his death the commission named its library the [Robert S. Rankin National Civil Rights Library](#) ^[13].

By gubernatorial appointment in 1967 he served as one of six members of Governor [Dan K. Moore](#) ^[14]'s Local Government Study Commission. Earlier (1965) the governor had appointed him a member of the Commission on the Study of the Board of Trustees of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[15].

Following his retirement after forty-two years of teaching at Duke, Rankin was honored by his colleagues with the publication of a festschrift, *Law and Justice: Essays in Honor of Robert S. Rankin* ^[16] (1970). Between 1971 and 1976 he served on Phi Beta Kappa's panel of distinguished speakers lecturing on a wide range of related subjects at colleges and universities around the country. Under grants awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, he served as director of forums in the humanities in nearly thirty libraries in North Carolina.

Among Rankin's published works were *When Civil Law Fails* ^[17] (1939), *Readings in American Government* ^[18] (1939), *Political Science in the South* ^[19] (1946), and *Government and Administration of North Carolina* ^[20] (1955). He also was coauthor of *Fundamentals of American National Government* ^[21] (1955), *Fundamentals of American Government: National, State, Local* ^[22] (1957), *Freedom and Emergency Powers in the Cold War* ^[23] (1964), and *Race and the Tobacco Industry* ^[24] (1970). He was a frequent contributor to both national and state periodicals.

Rankin married Dorothy Newsom of Durham in 1933, and they were the parents of Dorothy Battle (Mrs. Robert Houston Robinson) and Robert S., Jr., both of whom became attorneys. A Presbyterian, he was buried in Maplewood Cemetery, Durham.

References:

Carl Beck, ed., *Law and Justice: Essays in Honor of Robert S. Rankin* ^[16] (1970).

Duke University News Service (information file).

Durham Morning Herald, 6 June 1976.

Nat. Cyc. Am. Biog., vol. 59 (1980).

Raleigh News and Observer, 7 July 1976.

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, information release, 2 Nov. 1976.

Who Was Who in America, vol. 7 (1981).

Additional Resources:

Gosnell, Cullen Bryant. 1919. *Cullen Bryant Gosnell papers, 1919-1964*. <http://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/gosnell425/printable/> [25] (accessed August 12, 2014).

National Municipal League, John P. Wheeler, Charlotte Irvine, Edward M. Kresky, Robert B. Disman, Gordon E. Baker, Bennett Milton Rich, Ferrel Heady, and Robert S. Rankin. 1960. *The State Constitutional Studies Project*. New York: The League. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/state-constitutional-studies-project/oclc/018586071> [26] (accessed August 12, 2014).

Presidency in transition. Gainesville, Fla: Journal of Politics. 1949. <https://archive.org/details/presidencyintran00unse> [27] (accessed August 12, 2014).

Rankin, Robert S. 1898. *Robert S. Rankin papers, 1898-1977 (bulk 1927-1976)*. <http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003740641> [28] (accessed August 12, 2014).

Rankin, Robert S. 1960. *State constitutions: the bill of rights*. New York: National Municipal League. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/002092050> [29] (accessed August 12, 2014).

Rankin, Robert S. 129. "The oldest college west of the Alleghenies," in *Publications*. 1: 19-26. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/oldest-college-west-of-the-alleghenies/oclc/054978285> [30] (accessed August 12, 2014).

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) [31]

[Educators](#) [32]

Authors:

[Green, C. Sylvester](#) [33]

Origin - location:

[Durham County](#) [34]

[Durham](#) [35]

[Duke University](#) [36]

[Orange County](#) [37]

[Chapel Hill](#) [38]

[University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) [39]

[Wake Forest](#) [40]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#). [41]

1 January 1994 | Green, C. Sylvester

Source URL: <https://ncpedia.org/biography/rankin-robert-stanley>

Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/rankin-robert-stanley> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/green-charles-sylvester> [3] <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i> [4] <http://www.tusculum.edu/> [5] <http://www.princeton.edu/main/> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/duke-university> [7] <http://www.ua.edu/> [8] <http://www.stanford.edu/> [9] <http://www.columbia.edu/> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/wake-forest-university> [11] <http://spsa.net/about-spsa/> [12] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/durham> [13] <http://www.usccr.gov/about/library.php> [14] <https://ncpedia.org/moore-dan-killian-research-branch> [15] <https://ncpedia.org/university-north-carolina-chapel-hi> [16] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/law-and-justice-essays-in-honor-of-robert-s-rankin/oclc/69434> [17] [http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b22139;view=2up;seq=6](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b22139;view=2up;seq=6) [18] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/readings-in-american-government/oclc/2460422> [19] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/political-science-in-the-south/oclc/1397070> [20] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/government-and-administration-of-north-carolina/oclc/500563> [21] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/fundamentals-of-american-government/oclc/986008> [22] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/fundamentals-of-american-government-national-state-and-local/oclc/1439645> [23] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/freedom-and-emergency-powers-in-the-cold-war/oclc/513378> [24] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/race-and-the-tobacco-industry/oclc/11431109> [25] <http://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/gosnell425/printable/> [26] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/state-constitutional-studies-project/oclc/018586071> [27] <https://archive.org/details/presidencyintran00unse> [28] <http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003740641> [29] <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/002092050> [30] <https://www.worldcat.org/title/oldest-college-west-of-the-alleghenies/oclc/054978285> [31] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [32] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/educators> [33] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/green-c-sylvester> [34] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/d> [35] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-8> [36] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-34> [37] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont/o> [38] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-5> [39] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-33> [40] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/wake> [41] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry->

