

## Kenneth Roberts: Unflinching Truth

**A**UTHOR OF 26 books Roberts was a highly successful newspaper and magazine writer long before his fifth novel, "Northwest Passage," became his first best-seller in 1937.

The former **Boston Post** columnist and **Saturday Evening Post** staff writer had just completed proof reading for his seventh novel, "Water Unlimited," when he died in 1957.

Roberts was noted above all for his meticulous attention to accuracy and detail in everything he wrote. His historical novels often were called far better history than that in the history books.

Roberts himself said, "I think that most historians, like most professional men, should have stuck to farming."

Born in Kennebunk, Me., Roberts was graduated from Cornell University in 1908. For eight years he was a reporter, special writer and humor columnist for the **Boston Post**. Before joining the army in World War I to become a captain in the intelligence section of the Siberian Expeditionary Force, he worked briefly for **Puck** and **Life**.

He became a staff writer for the **Saturday Evening Post** during the editorship of the famed George Horace Lorimer, but resigned in 1930 to write "Arundel."

Several of Roberts' ancestors fought in the American Revolution. Family stories of their activities, which he heard as a boy, helped to turn him toward historical writing.

**A**N IRREPRESSIBLE and highly-acclaimed debunker, Roberts would not hesitate to report what he thought was accurate — provided only that he could "demonstrate its truth."

In 1921, when only 35, he campaigned vigorously for immigration restrictions, claiming that "the scum of the world, vermin-ridden and useless" was "clamoring to get over here."

When Senator Colt of the Senate Immigration Committee countered that no emergency legislation was needed to control immigration, Roberts wrote for the **Saturday Evening Post** an article "The Existence of an Emergency" which brought a nation-wide clamor for action.

Later Roberts was told by W. W. Husband, commissioner-general of immigration, that he had done more than any other person or agency to bring about the passage of immigration restrictions.

Twenty years later, Roberts was to turn his guns on the founding fathers themselves. The heroes of Bunker Hill, he wrote, were not the high-minded righteous crusaders that schoolbook historians always have pretended they were.

Another example of his unflinching respect for the "truth" as he saw it was his defense of the revolutionary war hero-turned-traitor, Benedict Arnold.

"Nothing is so valuable," wrote Roberts, "to a nation as the truth. Never, though I myself be damned for not doing it, will I curse Benedict Arnold."

In his "Rabble in Arms" Roberts contended that Arnold really had a high motive for his treason, since he thought it better to turn the colonies back to England than to leave them to fall into the hands of France—as he thought they would through the incompetence of the Continental Congress.

**R**OBERTS SPENT three years of grinding research to establish the authenticity of the background for "Northwest Passage" in the period of the French and Indian wars, 1754-63.

Last May Roberts received a special citation from the Pulitzer Prize Award Committee for "his historical novels which have long contributed to the creation of greater interest in our early American history."

He managed to save plenty of time apart from his writing for his frequent hot-tempered feuds with politicians, historians, and scientists. His private causes included most recently water-dowsing powers of Henry Gross, Federal game warden from York County, to whom he devoted two books, "Henry Gross and His Dowsing Rod" and "The Seventh Sense."

Roberts emphatically believed in the water-finding power of the forked stick and offered skeptics carefully documented "proof" that the rod would turn downward to find any underground water.

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### Stupidity Unlimited

**DR. Heini Hediger**, famous European animal behaviorist and director of the zoo in this city, has opened what he calls a museum of human imbecility in relation to caged animals.

It consists of a collection of objects, including many sharp weapons found in cages or taken from visitors with sadistic inclinations or at best a thoughtless attitude toward captive beasts.

Dr. Hediger recently escorted a man from the gardens who was trying to jab a monkey with a five-inch needle. His staff also has found rocks weighing up to three pounds that had been hurled at the bears.

According to Dr. Hediger, some visitors bring umbrellas into the zoo for the sole purpose of opening them suddenly to frighten the big cats, but he is unable to explain the presence of briefcases, hats and pairs of shoes and slippers that have been found in cages.

He also says that an elderly and normally torpid crocodile in an open tepid tank of water is the favorite target of a large number of coins. He has examined currency recovered and found that British pennies and Italian lire predominate. No Swiss money has been found.

The director thinks the coin throwers are impelled by some propitiatory motive akin to offerings to the ancient gods.

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