

Remembering Bob McJimsey

A few weeks ago, we finally took down the picture seen opposite here from the History Department's display case in the hall outside our suite in Palmer Hall. This was hard. Our colleague Robert Duncan McJimsey died on September 3, during the first week of the fall semester, but to imagine the department without him is difficult. We have liked having his photo recall to us his continuing presence and influence. In this electronic venue we maintain it, so inviting our and Bob's students and friends of many years to recollect his place in the History Department, at the College, and in our lives.

Bob was born in 1936 in Iowa and graduated from a sister college, Grinnell, in 1958. Thereafter, as a Rotary Club scholar, he studied at the University of London and returned to the United States for graduate work. He received his M.A. and Ph.D., for which he received a Fulbright Scholarship for research in England, from in the distinguished History program of the University of Wisconsin. Bob taught at Oberlin and Ohio Wesleyan before coming to Colorado College in 1968. Although he retired in 2004, he continued for several years to teach occasional blocks; his "Historical Essay" class at the Newberry Library was among our recent students' most memorable research experiences. Indeed, Bob's teaching on campus as in away programs was cherished by generations of students as an inviting, challenging entree into the historian's craft. A specialist in early modern Britain, he always brought rich erudition and exacting scholarly standards into the Colorado College classroom. Bob's transparent affection and respectful attention to both the people of the past and the students of today made him a beloved teacher as well as a respected authority on the policies of the British monarchy as it became a European and global power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He was meanwhile an important contributor to the discipline of history not only in his published work but in his advocacy for the work of others; he served repeatedly as an officer in various scholarly organizations, notably the Western Conference on British Studies. Bob chaired our department masterfully through a period of critical development in the 1980s. Meanwhile in the wider Colorado Springs community he was a forceful ethical presence, leading in the rescue of Grace Episcopal Church, the College's good neighbor, from difficult property litigation even in his final illness.



As his fellows, however, we wish here not to list Bob's manifold accomplishments, with which a high proportion of this readership will already be familiar, but to remember what he meant to us as colleague and a teacher, because these roles were his most important legacy to the History Department and his many students. Their character can best be framed in a few exact words, as particularly fitting because his own acute wit made the pithy remark Bob's own favored mode. When Bryan Rommel-Ruiz came in to the office a few hours after our colleagues' death, he exclaimed on first hearing the sad news, "I am so sorry. Bob always called us to be the best we could be." That is the heart of it. Bob was an exemplary human being--an inspiring teacher, a meticulous scholar, a warmly supportive colleague--but most importantly he was model of such intelligence and decency that we were honored and elevated in our friendship with him. As alumna and historian Heather Palmer noted in her letter to the Department on Bob's death, "His love for what he did, as well as his gift for doing it, was clear in every sentence he spoke." Yes. We were privileged to work and to laugh with him. We have been deeply shaped by him and carry on our work informed by his model.

--Carol Neel, for the History Department