

Remembrances from Colleagues and Friends

Joseph O. Baylen left his mark on Georgia State University and the Department of History. As chair of the department in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he guided the department through a period of remarkable growth that included the designations of areas of excellence and the hires of the last four chairs of the department. At a time when there was an adversarial relationship with the Dean's Office and the Central Administration, Joe Baylen served as a buffer protecting faculty in the department and their prerogatives. As one who followed in his footsteps, he set an example for me by excelling in teaching and research, while at the same time handling the required "administrivia" and being available to all, from early morning to late evening. After his retirement, I worked with him to establish the department's first graduate scholarship, the Baylen Fellowship, which he endowed with annual contributions. He remained keenly interested in the department, following it through the progress of the graduate students who were supported by his fellowship.

- ***Timothy Crimmins, Ph.D. | Professor and former Chair, History Department***

I cannot easily explain the debt that I personally owe Joe Baylen. Dr. Baylen hired me, mentored me, inspired me. I was privileged to be both his colleague and friend.

Joe's contribution was profound and long-lasting in making the History Department at Georgia State. His vision led to faculty with global expertise and excellence in scholarship. Yet however much Joe encouraged the faculty that he recruited, however much he achieved an impressive record of scholarship, it was his joy and mastery as teacher that I found most inspiring. The bond between Joe and his students was somewhat inexplicable, but never in doubt. Joe was loyal and committed to his students' well being; they in their turn were devoted to him. Joe Baylen (or J.O.B. or Dr. B. as we fondly called him) was one of those unforgettable characters whose like we are not going to see again and whose influence made a positive difference in so many of our lives.

- ***Diane Willen, Ph.D. | Professor Emeritus and former Chair, History Department***

Long before laptops computers or word processing applications became standard for university students, handwritten papers were typical. Indeed we were expected to write everything – term papers, book reviews (and there were plenty of those), essay exam answers in "long hand." Dr. Baylen never made any excuses about his own handwriting – at least to me – he told his classes that his was the worst and he had seen a lot of bad examples...and that ours better be readable.

It was probably somewhere in a fall quarter more than three decades ago that he entered our classroom with his hands full of book reviews that he had finished grading, and undoubtedly each was filled with words of wisdom or his trademark “see me JOB.” That day also gave JOB the opportunity to finally announce that his was NOT the worst scribbling he had seen.

In coat and tie (professors wore them then), he walked to the blackboard, picked up a piece of chalk and began drawing what looked like the great pyramids of Egypt and then announced -- “that’s Gladstone’s handwriting...and I can read it!” Then he scrawled his own name, pointing out how bad it was, then he turned to stare at the class, but really at me, and said, “but Diamond’s....that’s the worst, worse than mine, worse than Gladstone’s”! Then he turned to the board and basically drew what looked like something off of a bad EKG printout to illustrate the pitiful scrawl. Hence when he returned my paper it was no surprise that the grade was failing with the appendage – “until you write this so that I can read it!” So I did....I typed it – hunt and pecking my way on those old typewriters for 20 or so pages. When he next returned it to me he wrote at the top in big red letters: “This is failing until you can type it so that I can read it!”

I never wrote anything “long hand” or typed anything without the greatest care in more than 30 years of correspondence following that episode.

- ***Beryl Diamond, Ph.D. | Adjunct Professor, History Department***

When I was hired by GSU in 1977 I was teaching in Brazil. I flew up for an interview in April and Joe Baylen met me at the old airport. He could not drive at night because of night blindness (he had discovered this by way of an accident in the Army) and so brought a graduate student as driver. He informed me that I would be staying with him in his guest bedroom and because he only slept four or so hours a night he would wake me up in the morning. I did not wish my possible future chairman to come in and find me perhaps drooling on the pillow so I woke every fifteen minutes all night long and was in the shower when he came to get me. We had breakfast in the campus cafeteria, the “B and D,” better known as the “Bite and Die.” From there I went to the eighth floor of the GCB and met individually with most of the faculty; in those days we taught many of our survey courses in 50 minute classes five days a week just like high school and our teaching load was three classes a quarter, so we taught lots of surveys and most people were around most days. I did not give a general presentation but I did meet with the provost who quizzed me about my marriage and religion. About five in the afternoon when I finished I went to Joe’s office, where he had behind his desk had a large picture of a mouse giving the finger to a hawk swooping down to catch him, with a subtitle something like “The Last Defiant Gesture.” He pointed out of his office window toward Five Points and told I could catch a bus there to the airport. The next morning he called me at my parent’s home in North Carolina and told me that GSU would be offering me the job.

- ***David McCreery, Ph.D. | Professor, History Department***

The last time I saw Dr. Baylen, in Eastbourne in May of 2001, he met me at the train station. There was a pub where we talked, and then I followed behind him to the apartment. He tottered, so it had taken him a little while to walk those two blocks to the station, and then took him just as long tottering back.

Margaret was at home and the moment she saw me, she was utterly astonished and uttered a greeting that has become memorabilia in our family. She mistook me for someone taller she'd known for years.

"What's happened to you?!"

"This is Leonard."

"Oh!"

J.O.B. was very proud of his graduates. I remember the party in a downtown restaurant when we showed how proud and happy we were with him. As memorabilia I have the "J.O.B" T-shirt circulated that evening, bearing his catch phrase "See Me" which I frequently jot in the margins of intolerable essays.

When he retired, I was pleased that his son Jim let me purchase his piano which still graced Dr. Baylen's house where I had visited often to turn in weekly readings of various books or sometimes of the advance printer's copy of a work that, because of Dr. Baylen's stature as a reviewer, he received well ahead of official publication.

He was quite the British scholar, British in so many ways. I wonder if for his commemoration on someone might reprint his oeuvre and distribute a bibliography as a tool for teaching and learning. I do remember some of the more than 150 articles published, plus excerpts from his unfinished biography of W. T. Stead, details of which he shared with his classes. There was one occasion when I mentioned to him that I had found an author whom I could cite on a particular aspect of Anglo-Russian relations in the 1890s. He looked askance at me, and asked, more disappointed than anything else, "Why didn't you cite my article?" I had no good answer. It was a while before I knew that his publications covered such an expanse of territory in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras that the sun never set on them.

And it was this early naiveté that was also the reason I mistakenly, in the very beginning of our talks about dissertation topics, mentioned that I'd like to do something on Dickens. He turned my head immediately.

"Well, then I won't be directing it."

Late Victorian or Edwardian it would be.

Shortly afterward, he had just the topic for me.

He wanted to look into the papers of Arnold White, a little known journalist who thrived around 1900.

On my first trip to London, I looked into those papers, filed away in the Naval Museum at Greenwich. In England I found out enough to get an impression of his career. I told Dr. Baylen that Arnold White seemed ignoble.

"Well," he said without a moment's hesitation, "Someone's got to write about the ignoble."

True enough, as always.

- ***Leonard Ray Teel, Ph.D. | Professor, Department of Communications***