

Professor Matteson Honored for Service as Chair of Friends Board

A plaque on a study carrel in Owen D. Young Library is a lasting reminder of the service to the Friends of Owen D. Young and Launders Libraries of Robert S. Matteson, emeritus professor of English at St. Lawrence who served as the organization's chair for eight years, 2001-2009. The distinction of having a carrel named for him, and other less tangible but no less heartfelt recognitions, were presented to Professor Matteson at his farewell meeting of the board in fall 2009.

Bob Matteson was born and raised in New Paltz, N.Y., and graduated from Haverford College in 1953. He earned two master's degrees at Penn and, after three years in the Navy and three as a high school English teacher in New Jersey, his doctorate in English at the University of Oklahoma in 1968. Meanwhile, he'd joined the SLU faculty in 1965. He served as English department chair in the 1970s and retired and was elevated to emeritus status in 1993. A specialist in 18th-century English literature, he had a special interest in Irish letters, which gave him the perfect excuse to spend sabbaticals doing literary research in his beloved Ireland, and to take students there.

Bob married Betsy De Witt in 1958; they have three adult children.

"Bob kept FODYLL going for almost a decade and did a great deal of the work himself," notes his successor as chair, Albert Glover, Piskor Professor of English Emeritus at St. Lawrence. "During his tenure the FODYLL endowment, something Frank Piskor had envisioned, was established; it continues to grow and provides a small annual income for FODYLL activities. Modest to a fault, Bob did not call attention to his contributions as chair, secretary, treasurer, planner, host and mainstay. But with the help of Darlene Leonard, FODYLL flourished into our new century."

"I think of my teaching career as a fairly normal one, complete with its ups and downs, losses and victories," Matteson recalls. "I'm proud of leading the English department when we hired a number of talented women before it was either fashionable or required and, after retirement, completing thirty years of original work on a two-volume catalog of a 17th/18th-century Irish private library or a collection of 'books that few persons will wish to read' (which is, by the way, one of the categories established for the Boston Public Library). I also hear occasionally from a few of my former students, and about a year ago I was especially pleased to be able to help a recent SLU graduate land a good job.

"My relationship with the Friends began at the beginning," Matteson continues. "I still have and use my Charter Member bookmark signed by Doc Delmage and Frank Piskor. Service on the Board has always seemed to me an ideal way to contribute to St. Lawrence at its best. I'm also grateful to the several Board members who stepped up when there was work to be done -- editing a *Bulletin* or helping with a book sale -- and of course I'm most fortunate to have had Darlene Leonard as an able assistant and overseer of all things logistical."

Matteson adds, "I connect the importance of the Friends with the importance of our college libraries and their role as centers of teaching, learning, reading, writing, and research -- what education is, in large measure, all about -- and whatever the Friends can do to promote an informed or more than casual use of our library resources, printed and human as well as electronic, will always be to the good. I have read somewhere that the uniqueness of a library is the joy of discovery that can come from finding material you weren't even looking for (certainly part of my own experience), and I see the Friends of the future primarily as an organization both enabling and prompting that kind of experience for our students, faculty, and visitors."

Neal Burdick