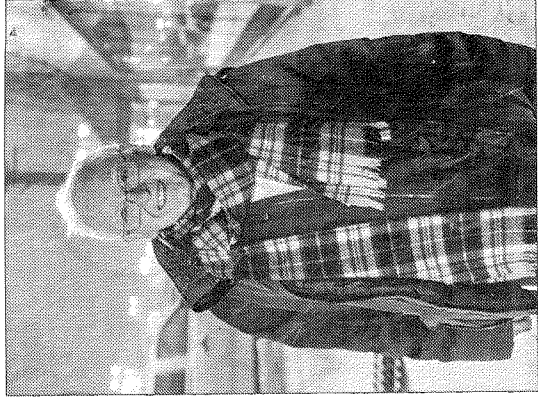


CHAR, TOWNS
8/15/24

D. A. Smith



D. A. "Don" Smith, 88, Professor Emeritus of History, died August 10, 2024, at the University of Iowa Hospitals, having recently suffered a stroke. A British historian who was a beloved mentor and teacher, he leaves a half-century legacy of service to Grinnell College, having joined the faculty in 1970, moving from his post as assistant professor at Yale University. A native of Cleveland, Tennessee, he earned a bachelor's degree at Vanderbilt University, bachelor's and master's degrees at Oxford University, where he was Rhodes Scholar (with specializations in both British and French history), and a doctorate at Yale University.

As a faculty member in Grinnell College's Department of History, Don offered courses in British history, and he partnered with faculty colleagues across the curriculum to team teach interdisciplinary courses, such as a celebrated course on The Enlightenment, in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2000 he was named L. F. Parker Professor of History. He considered his tutorial and his seminar on Alexis de Tocqueville, designed and taught as a senior faculty member, among the highlights of his teaching career.

Don's service to the academic mission of the college was extraordinary. He was chair of the faculty from 1986 to 1988. His service also included multiple terms as chair of the Department of History and as a member of the Executive Council. He was on the initial faculty planning group that, under the leadership of President George Drake and Professor Andrew Hsieh, established the College's institutional partnership with Nanjing University in China - one of the first U.S. colleges to do so. Over more than two decades, "Lao Shi Smith" taught courses and delivered lectures at Nanjing University, where he was revered by his Chinese colleagues.

From 1970 to 2001 Don was the college's adviser for Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships. In addition to his service to the Grinnell College's Phi Beta Kappa chapter, he served in different leadership roles - including president of Beta of Iowa. A long-time member of the Public Events Committee at the college, he - collaborating with Georgia Dentel, the College's liaison to performing arts professionals - brought prominent classical musicians to the community. His interest in opera infused the arts programming that he championed. He was also an advocate of the architecture on the Grinnell College campus, with a keen appreciation of The Forum, even interviewing famed architect Walter Netsch who designed The Forum, as part of a recognition of the building and its legacy.

Don was a life-long Democrat, and his involvement in and leadership of the Poweshiek County Democratic Party extended over his decades in Grinnell. Through his work in party politics, he established friendships with Iowans from all walks of life, taking great pride in his connections to people in the small communities of Poweshiek County and his ability to traverse the backroads of the state like an Iowa native. He was devoted to the Iowa Democratic caucuses. In the 1992 presidential election, he was a member of the Electoral College, casting his electoral vote for the Clinton/Gore ticket.

Don was preceded in death by his mother and father, Frances (née Higgins) and Tip Smith, as well as his brother, Gary K. Smith. He is survived by his family in Cleveland, Tennessee - sister-in-law Marguerite Smith; nieces and nephews Kent (Karen) Smith, Alan (Kelly) Smith, Leslie (Barrett) Painter and Lindsey (Thomas) Bell, along with many great nieces and nephews who adored him. His network of colleagues, former students and friends extends across the world.

A gathering to celebrate Don's life will be held at a date to be determined, possibly in late spring 2025 to coincide with Grinnell College's alumni reunion.