

## Obituary

### WILLIAM BRADFORD WILLCOX

Bill Willcox was good at something that few of us attain in such a measure: he knew how to enjoy the world and everything in it. One of the things he enjoyed most as a young man was mountains, and he became a proficient rock climber, whether it was on the brow of the Sleeping Giant, north of New Haven, Connecticut, or the summit of the Matterhorn. He loved horses. He loved dogs. He loved beautiful buildings. He loved good bread, which he regularly made for himself. He loved fresh orange juice and black coffee and dry martinis.

He also loved good scholarship, which is why he figures in these pages. Bill grew up in Ithaca, New York, where his father was professor of economics. After completing his B.A. at Cornell in 1928, Bill came to Yale to the School of Architecture, where he took a B.F.A. in 1932 before switching to history. In history, he gained a unique distinction as a graduate student: in 1936 his dissertation was awarded the Porter Prize for the best dissertation presented at Yale in any subject in that year, while it was simultaneously rejected by one of the readers for the history department. That discrepancy was corrected by a wiser fourth reader; and Bill went on to a distinguished career at Williams, at the University of Michigan, and, back at Yale from 1970 onward, as professor of history and editor-in-chief of the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*.

The Porter Prize was only the first of many prizes that Bill's publications on English history won for him. But he valued more the devotion of those who worked with him and for him at Michigan and Yale. Bill enjoyed people, and not least the family that shared his enthusiasms. Bill brought a light touch

and a lively sense of humor to whatever he did. He trusted others, and they returned that trust.

When it came time to die, Bill knew how to do that, too. Looking out over the fields and hills he loved so well, he talked warmly and cheerfully with the many friends and the beloved sister and children who came to be with him in his last days. He was a gentleman and a gentle man. The world could use a few more like him.

Edmund S. Morgan

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