

Blanchard Livingstone Rideout

April 28, 1906 — December 3, 1993

“I came to Cornell in 1933 in the middle of the Depression. My salary was \$1,350 per year and I taught eighteen hours. One of my early students, Anna Louise Roehrig, got the highest grade I ever gave. She became my wife soon after.” These words written by Blanchard Rideout in a charming, light hearted letter he sent a friend shortly before his death, could be the beginning of the Cornell biography of a man who in the next sixty years was to grace us all with his presence and until 1971, serve the University in more diverse ways than probably any other individual in its modern history.

Blanchard, who was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, received an A.B. degree in 1927, magna cum laude, from Harvard College, the A.M. degree from Harvard University in 1930, and the Ph.D. degree in 1936 from Cornell. He came to Cornell in 1933 after teaching French Language and Literature at the University of Vermont, Harvard, Radcliffe, and the University of Rochester. While he is remembered by his students as a lively and devoted teacher, it is his many services as a gifted and innovative administrator that gave him a place in the University’s history. A series of deans and especially Presidents soon became aware of his talents and he was asked over the years to undertake a host of University-wide administrative tasks, including Assistant Dean and Director of the Navy V-12 Program, chairman of the committee on Admissions for the College of Arts and Sciences, and founding director of the Division of Unclassified Students (DUS). In this respect, his enthusiastic promotion and dedicated leadership of DUS was both typical and outstanding. It was his conception and that of the Division that scores of students would find themselves every year having selected and been admitted to the college at Cornell that was not right for them, yet unable to transfer at once to the new college of their choice. DUS offered them the transitional opportunity to remain at Cornell, change curriculum and prove their admissibility into that second college. Hundreds of students, now loyal Cornell alumni, will attest that Blanchard helped them in this way through a difficult transition in their lives, and in effect saved them for Cornell.

From 1962 to 1965, Blanchard was also the founder and Project Director of Peace Corps Training Programs at Cornell. Finally, in 1966, he was appointed as Secretary of the University and occupied this position until his retirement in 1971, when he became Professor of Romance Studies Emeritus. He also served for twenty years as University Marshal and as such led the yearly Commencement procession and presided over the ceremony including calling out the names (many of them with a distinctly exotic flavor) of all the Ph.D. candidates. What struck observers of these activities was Blanchard’s unflappable authority and control.

During his life he received many honors including being named to Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, and many other honorary societies. He also served as director of the Sweet Briar Program in Paris and the Middlebury Graduate School of French during sabbatical leaves.

This brief list only gives a partial view of a man who served five Cornell Presidents but also touched the lives of thousands of students, many of whom remember him with affection and respect. Such was the case over the years for members of the Cornell University Glee Club, many of whom thought of themselves as part of the Rideout extended family. Blanchard was, if anyone ever was, a citizen of Cornell and of the world. He was always in love with France and spoke fluent idiomatic French, often traveled to that country and even served as a bi-lingual lecturer aboard the S.S. France on cruises around the world after he retired.

For Cornell, he was for many years an all around ambassador who received important visitors, introduced visiting VIPs to the University, and helped hundreds of foreign faculty members and students feel at home in Ithaca. The latter trait is typical of a man who was not only kind, but profoundly generous and thoughtful, as so many of us can attest. Blanchard helped many people in many ways, but always in a discreet and tactful fashion.

What perhaps stands out above all for his many friends was his irrepressible energy and sense of humor. He brought good cheer to all (including in his well known tour of friends' homes at Christmas as Santa Claus handing out outrageous ties). One always felt better off after talking to him, and his generosity of spirit included never burdening others with the problems of his jobs or his health. In the fullest and richest sense, he embodied an expression of his land of adoption: "joie de vivre".

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