

# Clinton Rossiter

*September 18, 1917 — July 10, 1970*

With the passing of Clinton Rossiter, Cornell University has lost a distinguished son and dedicated servant. A member of this Faculty since 1946, and from 1959 the holder of the John L. Senior Chair of American Institutions, his death at the age of fifty-two brought to a close a life of extraordinary achievement.

As few of us need reminding, his intellectual contributions were conjoined with a literary craftsmanship that carried his ideas to a wide and admiring audience. Significantly, this reputation never diminished his stature in the world of serious scholarship. Thus while more than a million copies of *The American Presidency* were sold in drugstores and supermarkets, the American Historical Association awarded him its coveted Bancroft Prize for *The Seedtime of the Republic*. And if editors, publishers, and producers continually called upon him for articles, interviews, and television appearances, his peers in the American Political Science Association twice elected him to their executive council.

The very subjects of Clinton Rossiter's books testify to his breadth of knowledge and catholicity of interests. Among his nine published volumes were a biography of Alexander Hamilton, studies of the Constitutional Convention and American political parties, and analyses of Marxist and conservative thought. It was not surprising that a worldwide community sought to share with Cornell his gifts of interpretation and analysis. Clinton Rossiter visited more than two hundred academic centers within this country, as prepared to speak at a small black college in the South as to deliver the Walgreen Lectures for the University of Chicago. In the same spirit, he accepted invitations to institutions on every overseas continent, ranging from an afternoon at an obscure Indian university, to six weeks in the Soviet Union, and a year as Pitt Professor of American History at Cambridge University.

While no stranger to the Tompkins County Airport, Clinton Rossiter's first loyalty was his citizenship in the Cornell community. Only on the rarest of occasions did any of his extramural engagements—including invitations to the White House—cause him to cancel a class. In his scheme of values this campus had first priority, to the extent that throughout his twenty-four years at Cornell he took only three sabbatical leaves, turning aside countless opportunities for more frequent respites from his scholastic schedule.

The son of a Cornell alumnus, and a graduate of our own College of Arts and Sciences, his affection for this community was manifested in countless ways. There was hardly a board or committee of which he had not been a member: Academic Freedom and Academic Integrity, Aptitude Testing and Long-Range Planning, Cornell

University Press, the Statler Club, and the Constituent Assembly are only a few of the assignments he accepted. The John L. Senior Professor even spent one Saturday morning on his hands and knees, scrubbing the floors of West Sibley Hall: a wash-in which moved Buildings and Properties to guarantee a more salutary standard of cleanliness across the campus.

He delighted in teaching the freshman class in American Government, even though fully entitled to confine himself to more advanced offerings. And his upperclass courses in American Political Thought and the American Presidency stood out as academic highpoints for literally thousands of Cornell alumni. At the same time, numerous letters from college and university teachers throughout the United States affirm that their graduate seminars with Clinton Rossiter demanded an intellectual rigor which provided a firm launching for their professional careers.

Here was a man who truly loved Cornell: who gave to an institution far more than he received in return; whose entire life was committed to the spirit and values of the educational mission embodied by this University. There can be no doubt that his imprint will endure. Yet bereft of his presence, Cornell can never be the same.

*Herbert Briggs, Arthur Mizener, Andrew Hacker*