



Richard T. Vann (1932-2022)

Richard T. Vann, Professor of History and Letters, Emeritus, passed away on February 1 at the age of 90.

Dick received bachelor's degrees from Southern Methodist University and Oxford University, and an MA and PhD from Harvard University. He arrived at Wesleyan in 1964 and taught in the College of Letters and history department until his retirement in 2000.

“Dick was an intellectual force at Wesleyan for decades—a gentle and persistent force for creative, interdisciplinary work across the humanities and social sciences,” recalled President Michael Roth. “A gifted teacher, his History and Prophecy seminar was already legendary when I was a student in the 1970s, and his work at the Center for the Humanities and at the journal *History and Theory* exemplified core values of Wesleyan's mission: independence of mind and generosity of spirit. Dick's interests were expansive, and his contributions profound.”

Longtime colleague and William Armstrong Professor of History and Professor of Letters, Emerita, Laurie Nussdorfer remembered Dick as “a bold thinker who was always willing to take a fresh and critical look at the status quo, whether it was the 17th-century English monarchy or the required course for the history major. In modeling how to be a member of two very different teaching and collegial cultures, he demonstrated principle, flexibility, kindness, and respect for everyone whether or not he agreed with them.”

“Dick was generous with his time, always curious, and deeply invested in our students,” recalled Ethan Kleinberg, Class of 1958 Distinguished Professor and Professor of Letters. “I cherish the time we worked together on *History and Theory* where his adventurous spirit lives on to this day.”

Brian Fay, William Griffin Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus said, “I spent countless hours working closely with Dick Vann as an editor of *History and Theory* and in other capacities, and I never saw him be anything but a generous reader, a kind editor, and a gracious colleague. He was hilariously funny and wore his considerable learning so lightly, and used it so deftly, that it was a pleasure to be with him. My friend Steve Horst of the philosophy department wrote to say that Dick Vann was the kind of person who inspired young faculty to say, ‘Wow, that's the kind of professor I want to be.’ I would add that for me he inspired me to think, ‘That's the kind of human being I want to be.’”

Dick is survived by his wife of 67 years, Patricia Fenn Vann, his daughter, Elizabeth Reneau Vann, and an extended family currently numbering 28 relatives. The family is planning a memorial service in early May, and further information will be forthcoming nearer the time.

Richard T. Vann

In memoriam

I served as secretary general under Richard Vann's presidency from 2000 until 2005, and organized our board meetings in Japan. I maintain many good memories of Professor Vann enjoying meetings and conferences, and will always treasure the thought-provoking conversations we had (Masayuki Sato)

I remember Richard Vann with his subtle smile and kindness as one of the founding members of our commission (Antonis Liakos)

I remember Richard Vann as an exceptionally kind and gentle person (Efi Gazi)

Richard Vann's contribution to the Commission and to "Storia della Storiografia" has been very important. And he had a quiet sense of irony and at the same time, he was full of empathy and humanity (Edoardo Tortarolo)

Richard was an open-minded and original thinker, and a lovely man (Sanjay Seth)

Richard Vann was active in the commission in the 1990s when Georg Iggers and Masayuki Sato were presidents. He was instrumental in introducing the linguistic turn to the history profession, not only publishing works by Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit but also offering his analysis of its impact (Q. Edward Wang)

Richard was the kindest man I know and I admired his scholarship (especially Richard's books on English Quakerism and articles published in "History and Theory"), as well as I liked him a lot personally. I also admired Richard's internal calmness. I have never seen him irritated or angry (Ewa Domańska)

Dick Vann was every inch a gentleman and a warm hearted colleague. Although he lived a very long and full life he will most certainly be missed by those who had the privilege to know him (Chris Lorenz)

[Vann Remembered](#) for Being a Bold Thinker and Demonstrating Respect
Wesleyan University, February 10, 2022

[Christine Foster's Interview with Richard Vann](#), August 2017