

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR ELMER N. FELTSKOG

Professor Elmer (“Al”) Feltskog died of congestive heart failure on Thursday, 21 December 2006 at the age of 71. He had been a resident of Harbor House for some time before his death. He is survived by four children: Mark (New York), Barbara Feltskog-Keene (Colorado), Ellen Thoma Feltskog (Edgerton), and Ben (Madison).

Al (as he was always known) was born on 7 July 1935. After receiving his B.A. from Augustana College and his M.A. from Washington State University, he completed his doctoral studies at the University of Illinois in 1965. He then joined the UW-Madison Department of English as assistant professor, becoming full professor in 1984. He specialized in early- and mid-nineteenth-century American literature.

His dissertation, a textual and critical study of Francis Parkman’s *The Oregon Trail*, showed his early mastery of one of several central texts in his later field of expertise, the literature of the American West. A revised version of this work, edited with a lengthy introduction, notes and commentary, was published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 1969. It was praised by reviewers as “penetrating,” “a meticulous piece of scholarship,” “an exciting achievement,” and “the definitive edition.” In accord with the Wisconsin Idea, it had a wide and enduring impact on a non-academic audience, becoming a Book of the Month Club alternate selection almost a decade later in 1976-78. His subsequent work on American classic authors included co-editions of Washington Irving’s *Mahomet and His Successors* and James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Al was treasured by his friends and colleagues for his wide and deep erudition, often in scholarship far outside his own field, knowledge that he always shared generously. He was also valued as an individualist, sometimes a diamond in the rough, resistant to intellectual fads. He was a physically large man of downright opinions and manner, who played an energetic game of departmental softball. Intellectually his own man, he declined to be impressed by fashionable French and Marxist literary theories; he was not interested in literature mainly as a site for social, economic, and political theorizing and appropriation, but as an imaginative entrance into the American experience in all its many and varied dimensions.

He taught both elementary and advanced courses in classic American literature, as was to be expected. Less predictably, he taught popular summer-school courses in detective fiction, about which he was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and in literature of the environment before that became as popular a subject for study as it now is. He had a loyal following of admirers among undergraduates, and his graduate students spoke enthusiastically and admiringly about his impressive breadth of knowledge. He devoted his life to teaching his students the value of humanistic study and the pleasures of literature, and they responded with gratitude and warmth.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE
Heather Dubrow
Richard Knowles, chair