

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

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS ROBERT McCUNE KINGDON**

Robert McCune Kingdon, Hilldale professor emeritus of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, died on Friday, December 3, 2010 in Madison, Wisconsin. He shaped the study of the Reformation both in the United States, where he served as beloved mentor to generations of scholars, and in Geneva, where he formed lifelong friendships, building scholarly and personal bridges between that city and American scholars. His own work, on Geneva and the French Reformation, was methodologically and conceptually path-breaking.

Born in Chicago, Illinois on December 29, 1927, Bob Kingdon spent his first twelve years in Hawaii, where he grew up barefoot. He graduated summa cum laude in 1949 from Oberlin College, and in the fall of that year, entered the graduate program in history at Columbia University, completing his MA the next year and his PhD in 1955, under the direction of Gerald Mattingly. For his dissertation, he posed what he called a hypothesis, on how the Reformation spread from John Calvin, in Geneva, outwards into France and elsewhere. To test that hypothesis, he went to Geneva, a place, Mattingly warned him, of no good restaurants. The product of that research, published as his first book, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555–1563* (Droz, 1956; fiftieth anniversary edition, 2007), detailed how ideas moved in the sixteenth century from a center of Reformation to isolated, persecuted communities. It was followed by *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564–1571* (Geneva and Madison, 1967). In total, he published six monographs and twelve edited volumes. In 1988, Kingdon published another path-breaking book, *Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres, 1572–1576* (Harvard University Press), which again drew upon his extraordinary archival knowledge to build a picture of the working of Reformation polemics. In 1995, he published *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (Harvard University Press), which offered some of the earliest findings from his work in the Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, overthrowing familiar clichés, as he so loved to do, with the substantial details culled from reading the sources. In these publications, a new sense of Calvin and Geneva emerged, of a supple disciplinary body, the Consistory, and of a man of considerable political skills who simultaneously revealed deeply humane pastoral concerns and a crystalline vision of morality.

Kingdon was one of the first American historians of the Reformation to go to the archives. His influence on the field is inseparable from his intimate and singular knowledge of the Genevan archives. In his own written work, he modeled history as he believed it should be written: whatever theory one might be testing, historians are bound by their sources; they must know those sources, have a mastery of them linguistically and contextually, and their interpretation must respect those sources, their voices, their perspectives. This deep respect for the voices of the past he taught his students. If there is a Kingdon school, this distinguishes them: “You must go to the archives” to answer any question.

From his commitment to archival research arose the last major project of his life, the publication of the Registers of the Consistory, the disciplinary body Calvin helped to found, first in their original language and then translated into English. In collaboration with Librairie Droz in Geneva, and working with a staff of editors, Kingdon was working through the registers from their beginning. He had raised the funds, much of it his own, to ensure the completion of the project after his death.

He began teaching at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1952. In 1957, he moved to the University of Iowa, where he was tenured. In 1965, he joined the history department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as full professor. As one colleague said of Kingdon's teaching, the lecture platform was to Bob what the telephone booth was to Clark Kent. In 1974, he was appointed a permanent member

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of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, serving as its director from 1975 to 1987. As director, Kingdon brought in major European historians who participated in his graduate seminars, fostering international conversations. He was still overseeing dissertations when he retired in 1998, in total some 34 on topics that ranged more widely than any other historian on either side of the Atlantic: on Reformation France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Scotland and England, the Reformed tradition, Martin Luther, the Catholic Church and the Catholic Reformation, women's history, and social, political, and religious history.

Kingdon was among the most celebrated of historians of the Reformation, both for the quality of his work and because he was beloved. He held fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies (1960–61), the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton (1965–66), and the Guggenheim Foundation (1969–70). He was awarded a Forschungspreis from the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung in Germany (1992–94). He served as president of the Society for Reformation Research (1970–71) and of the American Society of Church History (1980). He helped found the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, consciously non-denominational and ecumenical. He served many years as the editor of the SCSC journal, the *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, which offered dozens of younger scholars their first opportunity to publish. In 1988, he was awarded a Hilldale Professorship, the highest endowed chair of the university, and in 1992 was accorded the Hilldale Award in the Humanities, the university's highest recognition.

It would not, however, be a fitting tribute to the man, were it not to include one of those wonderful details he so treasured. Bob collected miniature penguins. In high school, he had been nicknamed "Penguin," and it was so like him to take a joke at his own expense and turn it into a source of glee.

Robert Kingdon is survived by his sister, Anna Carol Dudley of Berkeley, California, his brothers, Henry Shannon Kingdon of Dublin, California and Drummond, Wisconsin, John Wells Kingdon of Washington, D.C., Arthur McAfee Kingdon of Vassalboro, Maine, and ten nieces and nephews.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE  
Lee Palmer Wandel