
RRA—RIP

Rest In Peace, Amigo—

Bob Anderson, MH '60



ROBERT R. ANDERSON

FEBRUARY 12, 1942 ❖ OCTOBER 17, 2022

If you knew Bob at all, you likely have a sense of what an incredible fellow he was —without knowing the full extent. Good-natured, wry, multi-talented, he was a quiet humorist & master of asides, with an endless supply of surprising skills: *e.g., broadaxe craftsman; entrepreneur; master of the Guilford Hounds; painter; novelist; poet (“for people who don’t like poetry”); golfer; church & community historian....*

As an independent scholar, he applied his knowledge of fox-&-hounds to answer the question of who wrote Shakespeare. As member of an historical society of quirky antiquarians—*COV, Club of Odd Volumes* — he loved shedding light into nooks & corners, as with his talk on Kipling.

Coming to Mount Hermon from a Ct.

chicken farm, he became a varsity pole-vaulter, captained the wrestling team, & was friendly with pretty much everyone, even Yours Crudely. We roomed together two years, an odd couple

indeed. What I remember most is that we laughed a lot.

BOB GAVE VARIOUS TALKS ON THE KIPLINGS’ BRATTLEBORO TIME. THE FILE FOR ONE, PLUS A FEW OTHER WORKS BY HIM, CAN BE FOUND ON THE LINKS/CONTACT PAGE AT WWW.NMH1960.NET.

MY FAVORITES ARE HIS SMALL HARD-COPY WORKS, AT LEAST PARTLY FOR THE PHYSICAL FEEL ALAS, THE SITE THAT USED TO SHOW MANY OF HIS PAINTINGS NOW COMES UP EMPTY, BLANK.

distinctive tracks of the rare fellow himself, as the following, snipped from the last few years, reflect.



“You can tell a lot about a man from his books and his dogs....”

Even as Bob played institutional traditionalist by day, he let his trickster spirit run on the page, as in various e-books, at least 2 with recognizable old-school settings.

“Regarding the Earl of Oxford (Shakespeare), read... ‘*Shakespeare by Another Name: The Life of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, The Man Who Was Shakespeare.*’ The first couple dozen pages should do (like most book these days it is ridiculously fat).”

[Bob had already published a booklet of small size reaching the same conclusion based on fox-hunting know-how.]

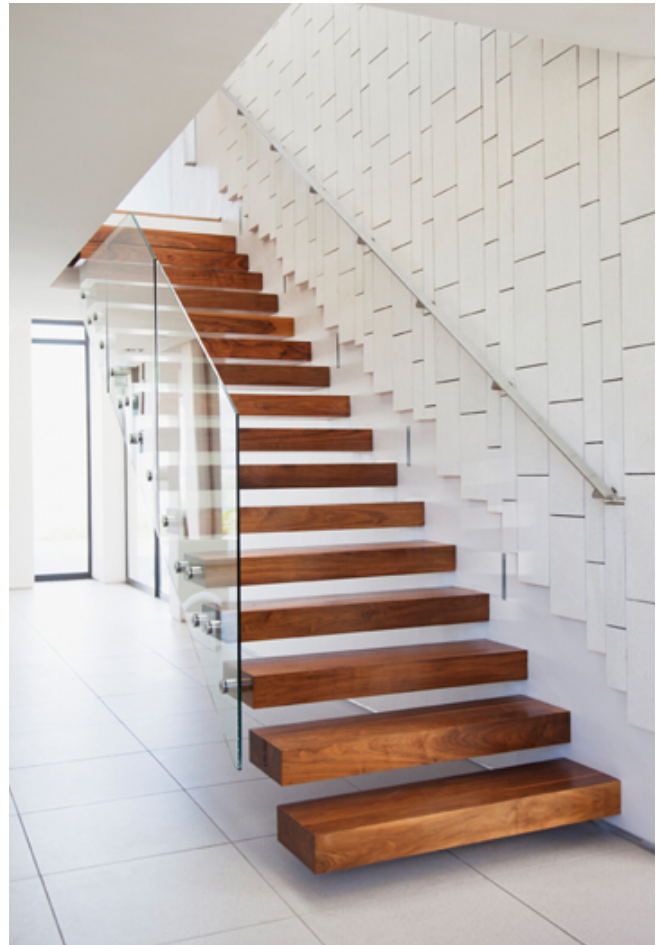
“Currently, I’ve been amusing myself writing book reviews for the church’s monthly bulletin of books in the church library. Having nothing but those with which to amuse you, I send several herewith. I also attach the text for the after supper talk I am delivering next year at the Club of Odd Volumes on Kipling in Vermont. (Flip Mason’s a fellow member!)

“Read Kipling’s poem ‘The Betrothed,’ an 1881 breach of promise case in which the bride-to-be states “You must choose between me and your cigar.” It contains the best-known couplet in the English language--but I will let you find it yourself. I am reciting it at church in a couple of weeks after my talk on ‘Kipling in Brattleboro.’ (“I did send you the text, did I not? Were it not that I am still winning at chess on the computer, I might begin to suspect.... PBS had a couple hours on Twain last week...& his meeting with Kipling, but I can’t recall a thing about it.)

[Although Bob was himself both a fully engaged Episcopalian & local Republican chairman, he was also a true believer in the separation of church & state, even waging a campaign to remove Christmas, Hannukah, etc. as federal holidays.]

“Actually, I dearly love the Advent and Christmas season in the Episcopal Church but that is beside the point. The government should tolerate religions, yes, but not endorse their components. What fun it is to stick a branch in the wheel’s spokes--already I can hear the howls of rage. What fun indeed! RRA”

[As experienced with another MH classmate or two, Bob showed that personal friendship could also be separate from both church & state....]



“Odd after all these decades and thousands of miles we are still connected. And could we be any different? I have voted for one Democrat in my life and that because he was a friend (and let the Guilford Hounds and my bird dogs hunt across his land) and his opponent was legitimately crazy (I was the Republican town chairman so I knew the idiot. Usually idiots run as Democrats.). Why do I suspect that your votes for Republicans might be slight in number? And with all these differences, we are still affectionate friends. Makes no sense. God (the Episcopalian one) bless you, old roommate. RRA (March 2019)

[Bob’s capacity for affectionate connection was key to his core, reflected in his marriage & relations with friends, dogs, land, place, community—even with bulls.]

“There is nothing in my experience that is as exciting as standing over a pointing bird dog in heavy cover awaiting the flush of a game bird (usually in an impossible direction...). Unless, perhaps, the sound of the pack when it finally locked on the scent and gave tongue. As huntsman, I would blow the famous old call on the hunting horn, ‘Gone Away’ and we would surge forward. Ah my, what the rest of humanity misses. RRA

“In Vermont, January has sixty days. Incidentally, I have noticed that this year Christmas advertising began shortly after the 4th of July. RRA

[One of the early presidents of the nearby United World College of the American West had known &, with others in his family, ridden with Bob, and considered a painting by him a family treasure. If “Gentlemen’s C” to Guilford Hounds weren’t leap enough, Bob wanted to go from riding with the pack to ***running with the bulls***—]

“Spring is upon us and with it golf, trout fishing, and that on-going nuisance, the game of squash.... I am writing a contribution for a local history society about Brattleboro printing and publishing (surprisingly extensive)..... But now I lust to run with the bulls at Pamplona. Want to run with me?

“Becky is not particularly enthusiastic about the concept...& in fact curses quite a bit when I bring up the subject. But, I remind her, I hunted our pack of foxhounds for fifteen years....There is an old British chestnut that hunting hounds has all the thrills of combat with only a quarter its danger. Only one season was I so damaged that I couldn’t hunt full-time (twice weekly) & I once rode a full season with a hernia. Ah, how the memories linger! Roll me over in the clover... RRA”

“Why does everyone seem so opposed to joining me running with the bulls? It is no longer safe to broach the idea domestically for fear of being conked on the head with a cast iron frying pan. To answer your inquiry about Becky: she is capable of wielding cast iron aggressively and still beats me at squash. Fond regards, RRA

[For years, I was strongly on Becky’s side in this, based on my view that Pamplona was a good deal more dangerous & less controllable than riding with the hounds, which carried no weight with him. As time went on, the equation changed. I wrote him last July that I no longer objected, & offered my blessing (but not my company). On his side, his respect for Becky’s cast-iron skills—& his medical issues—had pretty much ended the seriousness of the issue. Likely, he’d have managed it with no more than a smear of bull-sweat. It turns out his bull affection had roots closer to home, in his personal relations & penchant for perverse humor.]

“I’ve had several teams of oxen so I am well aware of how to manage among large beasts: basically, you go with them rather than agin them (particularly when horns are involved).”

“Easy Yoke: May this amuse you in unamusing times. During the eighties I owned several yoke of oxen, the best a beautiful matched pair of mahogany-colored Durhams, each a ton. I was drawing logs with them by our roadside once when an automobile stopped & the lady occupants got out to observe, oxen not being a common sight even in rural Guilford. Needing slack to detach the chain from the log, I instructed, ‘Back up,’ but, noticing the ladies watching intently, added ‘eighteen inches.’ (Typically, when the team stepped back the distance was a couple of feet.)

*The spectators were dumbfounded. ‘How do you teach them measurements?’ one asked. I shrugged and detached the chain from the log. ‘Step up... twenty-four inches,’ I instructed, and Jim and Jerry stepped forward, ready to get another log. The mystified ladies returned to their car and drove away. I often wonder what they told their husbands that evening over supper. *Be well.*”*

[Whereas affection for animals & land inspired his painting (examples of which are no longer showing up on the old website for them), Bob’s sometimes perverse sense of humor found expression in his recreational fictions. Besides mysteries & farce, he especially liked sharing an example of adolescent adventures at NMH, ‘A Gentlemen’s C,’ with readers familiar with its setting, (The piece is available on the **Links (Contacts)** page at **www.nmh1960.net**.)]

“Reading fiction will not cause sores and boils to break forth upon your epidermis. Gird up your loins and sally forth. I think my ‘Gentlemen’s C’ will bring back memories of MH and perhaps an occasional cringe. Enjoy! “Come all you hardy fellows and sing a lusty song....” If nothing else, ‘C’ is a triumph of political incorrectness and bad taste and a true reflection of the way we were. But I grow too sentimental, unmanly

tears might flow. Alarah, Alarah, Hermon, Hermon, Hermon

"I'll be interested in your observation about the narrator's sermon from the pulpit. If you have read '*Lucky Jim*' by Kingsley Amos you will recognize its inspiration--but the narrator was frighteningly sober, not drunk as in '*Lucky Jim*.' This afternoon I was poking around on the computer and found quite a bit about the Inn and the chateau—both to be found in "C."
"Occasionally, my bird dog and I hunt pheasants in the riverside cornfields which give a view of the chapel tower on the horizon. Yo yah, yo yah.....RRA

[Alas, his longer fictions were mostly beyond my own short attention span, & same for Amis' work, so still haven't searched for the sermon referred to. If you go there, be warned. He mentioned elsewhere about sharing the file with a fellow member of his church choir, a woman who apparently detested it & said it represented everything she couldn't stand about adolescent boys. That Bob's humor menu was quite varied may be seen in the following.]

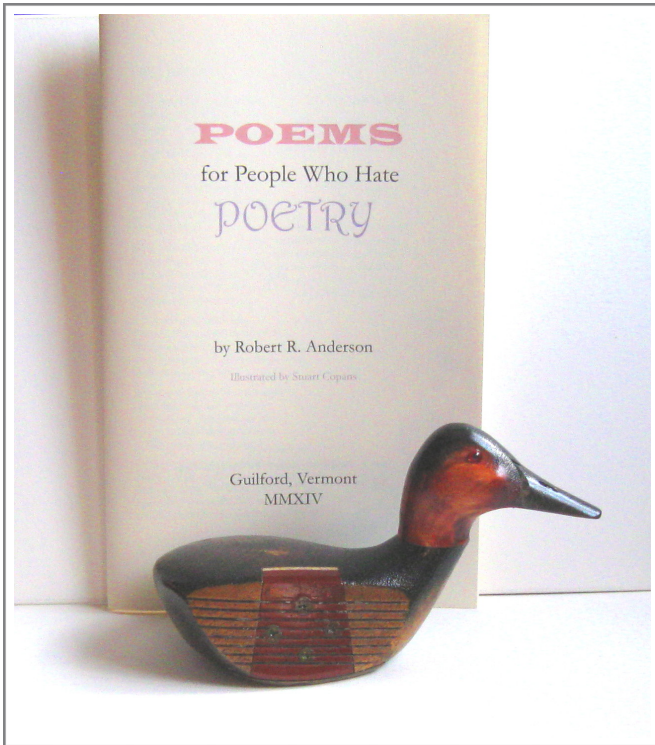
"The leaves are turning, the woodcock season approaches, and my bird dog is recovering from surgery. I would like to make "*A Gentleman's C*" available to classmates The NMH headmaster occasionally attends our church and I have discussed the book with him, primarily the potential for lawsuits, and sent him the first few pages. But, since it is unpublished, I suspect it will be tolerated as an amusement for our classmates. I dated... [*name withheld to protect the innocent*] and she might get a touch sticky, though the female in the story was not modeled on her. I suppose I could add a disclaimer. *RRA*" (08/22/2020 or so)

[Consider that Bob's disclaimer. The characters are fictional (at best), and though some mostly faculty models may have been in mind, none I recognized.]

"I just remembered that I wrote another e-book which involves Northfield School for Girls. I had noticed a long while past a front page article in the Wall Street Journal about the possibility for an author to publish directly through the computer by-passing author's agents as well as publishers. I had worked for three years at Houghton Mifflin and ten at The Stephen Greene Press in Brattleboro, considered the best of the small publishers. So I whipped off the attached as an experiment.

"Perhaps it should be included with A Gentleman's C on our magnificent web site. Not all readers liked it, but upon re-reading it recently, I think it has a certain charm. I used a second color for the title which may not print on your copy, so the title is "Equine Intrigue: A Maiden's Tale. Yo yah, yo yah RRA ["RRA-American Country...]

[While I haven't glanced at it myself yet, it should be available shortly on the *Links/ Contact* page at www.nmh1960.net, along with any other RRA files found. Bob's interest in wringing humor from literary sources wasn't limited to arcane historical niches & unbridled romps, as suggested in his *Poems for People Who Hate Poetry*, as well as in his bull management.]



“No longer will I write poesy,” the poet announced.... “My soul is empty. There are no more mountains to climb, no rivers to ford. I have said it all. What remains is silence.”

[Despite claims in reviews he penned of his own work under pseudonyms, Bob’s poetry wasn’t very Frostian, but tweaked humor from human, linguistic & institutional quirks, foibles & pretensions, with an occasional homage to hounds & curmudgeons. One fictional reviewer wrote, “As your eyesight fails, may you take less pleasure in shooting peasants & more in eating crow.” My personal response was usually to take my doggerel out for a walk....]

“Jack, the bird dog, and I are afield for the second time tomorrow. The first time was a disaster. I ripped muscled in my armpit doing pasture work two weeks ago. Slightly improved but the interim was excruciating.... RRA” (10-7-20)

[It seems Jack was also Bob’s write-in-candidate for president in 2016.]

*“Time flies like an arrow.
Fruit flies like a banana.”*

[While presumably not *by* Bob, I learned *from* him. Its actual source is both unclear & recent enough, he *could* have fine-tuned it. There is no evidence that Groucho did. It sounds like a question for the *COV*—not the *COV* in the news. Bob’s *COV* refers to the *Club of Odd Volumes*, which I suppose could be a figment of his imagination, but even if so, with such convincing detail, I’m believing it really exists, just as described.]

“You will find little about the COV as we are not interested in public scrutiny. Since its founding in 1887 by a group of local bibliophiles, it has been considered the only intellectual club among Boston clubs, the rest being social, although the Tavern Club has amateur theatrical inclinations (and quite a few COV members). The reputation of providing the best conversation in the city still attaches. The club meets monthly October through May for dinner and a speaker. Saturday lunches are held weekly throughout the season and there is an offshoot called the Bibliophiles which meets monthly as well.

"The COV resembles the Grolier Club in Manhattan in intent but the Grolier intends to educate the public about the book arts (we do not and are intensely private). Remind me to tell you about Churchill's visit (he was reluctant to depart!). We publish for the members occasional bibliophilic volumes and ephemera (my *Shakespeare Hunts*, for instance). The club owns #77 Mount Vernon Street, a five-story brick row house with a large dining room attached at the back.

"Incidentally, the membership is male and we still smoke cigars after dinner. Recall the Brattleboro poet Rudyard Kipling's poem...in which a marriage conditioned upon the prospective husband giving up smoking cigars...leads him to re-consider the proposition: "Open the old cigar box--let me consider anew--/ Old friends, and who is Maggie that I should abandon you?/ A million surplus Maggies are willing to bear the yoke;/ And a woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke/ Light me another Cuba--I hold to my first-sworn vows./ If Maggie will have no rival, I'll have no Maggie for spouse." That reminds me, I should order more cigars. Churchill story to follow. Best wishes, RRA

[I'll save for another time Bob's Churchill story, plus his tale of the distinguished MH librarian Bill Morrow in retirement (Bob's boss senior year). As for his truly personal feelings (behind the false-chauvinist facade), on hearing of my wife's passing, Bob's responded:]

"Some fortunate marriages blend two people into a unit without sacrificing either's individuality. How this happens is beyond my feeble understanding, but it does happen (I am the beneficiary of this, thank goodness, and I suspect you, too). I shudder to think how the one of us who survives will cope. Every day is special because the sands are running fast now. Stay in touch, dear old roommate, RRA"

[The first I heard of any physical struggles was usually well into recovery. As he explained elsewhere, he felt golf provided a more accurate indicator of condition than medical tests.]

"I have spent the winter under the surgeon's gory blade, first to remove what ailed me and twice more to determine that nothing else was wrong. I look as though I was on the losing side of a bayonet charge....The surgeon cut out of me a small chunk of intestine...This morning my regular doctor examined me and said I am fine and better than ever. Then I went and hit golf balls for an hour on the driving range, inane perhaps but reassuring....

"I am expecting to re-start life in a couple of months although I have never felt better. One side effect of the chemo drug I take was swollen and blistered feet (aggravated, no doubt, by eighteen holes of golf on foot on a hilly course in 95 degree heat in too tight shoes in mid-summer). Thus, I added a podiatrist to my list of medicos. I am allowed now to play squash (which I loathe, story for another time). He swears I'll be allowed to follow my bird dog in pursuit of woodcock in a couple weeks. I cannot walk the golf course, however. Astonishingly, the last couple of prior rounds were at par-- and I have always been a mid-eighties golfer. Frustration mounts. Be well, RRA

[The last emails from Bob were April & May 2022, during our huge spring fire, preceding our summer floods—]

“I keep thinking about the misery that you are going through and the uncertainty of what next or even is there a next. We went through Northfield Friday on the way to fishing the Millers River. You would be amazed at how little it has changed in six decades. Be of good cheer (if possible) and recall happier adolescent times. I often do so. RRA

“I have been through two colossal floods, one in 1955 back on the farm and another a decade ago here. In both cases we were safe due to hilltop locations but stranded for many, many days. I recall in '55 looking up into the sky and seeing Ike's helicopter hovering over us. Several years went by before a degree of normalcy returned (only a degree). I would choose flood for fire any day--be safe. RRA”

[Last July, about Pamplona time, I dropped him a note saying that no doubt the bulls were lucky they didn't have RRA to kick them around, but that fire, flood & frailty had changed my view of *him* running with them. Becky's cast-iron resolve aside, I offering my personal blessings going forward. I imagine him chuckling.

I had no conscious sense he'd had a relapse or new struggle until the following arrived from his email address the first day of December, the day before the postman delivered the program, from which photos on pages 1 & 2 are copied.]

“Dear Bodner: Bob passed away from cancer on October 17th. I just sent you the program from the graveside service.... Love, Becky”

Besides his wife Becky, Bob left an adult son. I don't know if they still check Bob's *email address* at broadaxe@comcast.net, nor do I have separate ones for them. Snail mail presumably still goes to 1320 Lee Road, Guilford, VT 05301.

On a personal note, I don't remember knowing before that Bob shared his birthday with Abe Lincoln, the old log-splitter himself, also endowed with a wry sense of humor that sometimes simply noted the obvious—albeit from a tilted angle. Reminds me that I hardly ever laughed harder in my life than a few times with Bob, once with his butt out the 3rd floor dorm window after a winter gorge on West Hall's hot bean-chilé...)

RmB (Ye Olde 'Dick'), 12 February 2023



LINKS:

for files of a few of Bob's works—

<https://www.nmh1960.net/contact/>

this tribute—

<https://www.nmh1960.net/obits/>