

2019 Kenelly-Voss Distinguished Emeriti Award



Dr. Jerome V. Reel, Professor Emeritus of History, Vice Provost and University Historian

This award was established by the late John Kenelly to recognize emeritus faculty member who have made outstanding contributions to the Emeritus College, Clemson University, the greater Clemson community, and to society. The name of the award also pays tribute to John's late wife, Charmaine Voss. In addition to recognition by the Emeritus College, the award provides \$500 toward the purchase of library materials for donation to Clemson Libraries in the award recipient name.

On behalf of the Emeritus College, I am truly humbled and honored to present the 2019 Distinguished Emeriti Award to a gentleman and a scholar, who is truly an icon of Clemson University, who has enjoyed a long and storied career here, who was born in 1937 in New Orleans, and who, many of you by now have surmised to be, Dr. Jerome V. Reel.

Dr. Reel's nomination letter reads in part: His "contributions to the students, administration, Board of Trustees, and Emeritus college go beyond what most people only imagine. His dedication and commitment to Clemson University is exceptional and the Clemson University community is more enriched because of his outstanding leadership, support and keen intellect."

Jerry Reel, his mother Ruby, father Jerome and brother David lived next door in New Orleans to the family of Edmee Jane Franklin, who was kind and gracious enough to marry Jerry and to birth and raise three children (Helen, Jay, and Elizabeth) with Jerry in Clemson town.

Jerry along with Edmee began putting down their roots in Clemson in 1963, when he joined the faculty as an instructor in the History Department while still finishing his Ph.D. in British medieval history at Emory University. His plan was just to stay long enough at Clemson..."just passing thru"... to finish his research, but he fortunately never left us!

Dr. Reel soon advanced to assistant and associate professor, and was named professor of history in 1971. During the late 1970s, Jerry along with some colleagues in the history department developed a one-credit-hour class, Clemson 101, for new Clemson students that explained the whos, hows, whens, and whys of Clemson University's history and existence. Clemson 101 was taught for several decades and as his nominator for this award commented: "The Class was fun and very informative....His delightful stories kept the students entertained and interested in learning more about Clemson....the students learned so much from him and gained an admiration for his love, passion and knowledge of the Clemson Community."

During his sixteen years at Clemson in 1979, Dr. Reel joined the administrative ranks and served as undergraduate dean. This position evolved over the next 25 years into a vice provost position overseeing student's academic needs. He also continued to teach, supervise graduate students and share the university's history while being undergraduate dean. For a moment, just imagine all the interfaces Jerry had in those 25 years: Presidents, provosts, department chairs, faculty, registrars, admission personnel and students. Some interactions had to be tense, while others were pleasant. Here is what Jerry told a newspaper reporter about those years: "It was so interesting because we had many clients, each with two parents." You have to contend on a daily basis with "the kind of things that are not solvable immediately, like finding someone to teach Russian or Chinese while a student is waiting in line for the class. Parents would say, 'Given how much tuition we pay you, you ought to be able to teach him whatever he wants.'"

In 2003, after 40 years of service to Clemson University, Dr. Reel retired and became History Professor and Undergraduate Dean Emeritus. He also took on the role of Clemson University Historian per that appointment by President James Barker.

A reporter (Mike Eads) from the *Anderson Independent Mail*, which I often referenced here, in a 2016 article posed a question to Dr. Reel about his retirement. "So will the old history prof ever set all of that work aside and go fishing with wife Edmee, or maybe work on his golf game? Dr. Reel gave a characteristic deadpan response to becoming a fisherman: "I'm not a fisherman – I leave that to Jesus and the 12 apostles...I enjoy what I am doing."

His remark was really on target: Jerry's emeriti ministry was to be in Thomas Green Clemson's words, "a high seminary of learning". Jerry's love of Clemson, his knowledge, experience and memories, and his exhaustive library research all constellated as Jerry wrote a two-volume history of Clemson University, *The High Seminary*. The 1st volume published in 2011, recounts the work of Mr. Clemson and others after the Civil War to have an agricultural college established in the Upstate in 1889, the college's evolution from an agricultural, mechanical and military mission before WWII to the admission of women and expansion of liberal arts and graduate offerings, Harvey Gantt's peaceful matriculation and the recasting of Clemson Agricultural College into Clemson University. The 2nd volume of *The High Seminary* published in 2013 covers the years 1964 to 2000. President James Barker commented as follows on volume 2: "This book begins when the modern era began with the name change to Clemson University effective on July 1, 1964. Once again, Dr. Reel has documented the facts and shared the fascinating personal stories that make history come alive during the decades of Clemson's climb into the top ranks of American public universities."

Dr. Reel's Clemson career honors include:

- Students nominated Dr. Reel as an Alumni Master Teacher in 1975.
- In 2014, Dr. Reel received the University's highest honor: The Clemson Medallion. At the same awards ceremony lifetime trustee, Smyth McKissick also received The Clemson Medallion. President James Clements commented at the ceremony: "These two gentlemen each have devoted decades of their lives to Clemson and its faculty, staff and students. Clemson would not be the university it is today without their hard work and leadership. It is a great honor to recognize them for their dedication, exceptional example and continuing impact."