

There was no one who reflected the mission of Montana State University more than Michael P. Malone, tenth president of the university. He was a superb teacher in the Department of History and Philosophy teaching classes that never failed to fill to their capacity. Although he specialized in western history, Michael brought the world to his students. Michael's many students were better people, and as many have attested, more concerned and sensitive to public responsibility, because of their contact with him.

Michael Malone was one of the premier historians of Montana and the West at the time of his death. His history of Montana written in collaboration with his colleagues, the late Richard Roeder and William Lang, remains the standard text on the history of this state even more than a decade after his passing. His nine books and twenty scholarly articles set a standard for research and interpretation that continues to inform the study of western history. Michael is among that small pantheon of American historians who do not go out of style, but continue to be read profitably long after their working days have come to an end.

Michael took the land-grant mission of service - professional and public - seriously. In 1972-73 Michael and Professor Roeder traveled the state, especially eastern Montana, to acquaint the public with the newly created Montana Committee for the Humanities. This effort served to convince many that they could share in programs which hitherto had been difficult to access in these more distant reaches of this large state. For many years Michael visited the state's small towns and large bringing Montana's past to as many people as possible. It is not possible to attend a town meeting discussing Montana's past anywhere in the state, even after a quarter of a century, without someone recalling a vivid memory of hearing Michael speak. He touched people's lives in the classroom, small-town school rooms, courthouse basements and countless living rooms where people gathered to share his passion for Montana's history.

In 1979 Michael left the Department of History and Philosophy to pursue his commitment to research and service in a new capacity as the Dean of the Graduate School. He set a standard for university administration that few have matched. While directing the development of research efforts across the university he continued to produce original work at an astounding pace. His own research continued to focus on Montana as well as the wider context of the American West. His advancement over the years to Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs and in 1991 to President of the University did not diminish his scholarly work. At the time of his death he was under contract with Yale University to write a history of the modern west since 1930.

Michael's years as President witnessed a steady growth of the university's student population and funded research. He continued and expanded on the work of his predecessors to grow Montana State into a university in fact as well as name. That is visually evidenced by the substantial expansion of classroom and research facilities as well as rehabilitation of a number of older buildings during his tenure. Not the least of these accomplishments was the transformation of the central campus from a site reminiscent of a warehouse district to the welcoming gathering place for students, faculty, staff and visitors it is today.

Michael's life revolved around Montana State University. He was born and raised within five hundred miles of the campus. He attended undergraduate and graduate school in Washington State and after a one-year residence in Texas came to Montana State University as an Assistant Professor of History in 1967. Twenty-three years later he was the President of a major university that in teaching, research and service bore his stamp. His was a remarkable life that touched all parts of the university much as the centennial mall that Montana State University seeks to name in his memory touches all parts of the campus and all of those who pass through its gates.

(Thomas Wessel)