Celebrating the Life and Career of
RALPH KETCHAM
Ralph came to Syracuse University in 1951 to teach in the Maxwell School’s citizenship curriculum while working toward his PhD. He’d leave in 1956 for two junior faculty positions, at the University of Chicago and then Yale, returning to Maxwell in 1963. Holding appointments in American studies, political science, and history, he would never again leave Maxwell, teaching as recently as fall 2016.

I am convinced that the focus on citizenship and ethics is our school’s finest and most important characteristic and Professor Ketcham was the heart and soul of the Maxwell School and of that focus. . . . To see Professor Ketcham in colonial garb near the statue of Washington and to speak with him on early American history is perhaps as close as you could get to talking with a Founding Father.

Justin Fugle ’91 BA (IR/PSc)

In these very troubling times in America, it is a comfort to us who learned “citizenship” and history in the late 50’s and early 60’s from professors like Ralph Ketcham (and Mike Sawyer) that there was once a true sense of what was required of us as American citizens. . . . I have tried to live in my 50-plus years since graduating from Syracuse living the values so lovingly instilled in me by Ralph Ketcham.

Marge (Goldmann) Marciano-Vere ’62 BA (Hist)

I was young, intellectually naive, and did not look like any of the other graduate students. Professor Ketcham was as open, encouraging, and positively reinforcing of me as of any of the other students in the group. To this day, I can recite word-for-word the comments he made on my paper comparing Jefferson and Hamilton’s visions for what our new nation could be.

Linda (Schluter) Day ’69 MSSc/’70 PhD (SSc)

I took my first doctoral course from Dr. Ketcham in 1968. Here I was — a commuting-from-Cortland working, married woman raising four young children — sort of a novelty, unfortunately, back then. I entered the class, held at his home, with a bit of trepidation. Could I manage a doctoral program with my already-busy life? And with all these single or married-with-a-supporting-wife young men? He assured me I could, and throughout my studies and dissertation I always remembered that.

Linda Biemer ’79 PhD (SSc)

I remember I used to joke around him and say Professor “Ketchup” and he would never correct me. It was as if deep down inside he enjoyed silly students, like myself, talking with him and knowing that we all really saw him as simply one of us. He really liked that.

Johnny Polanco ’91 BA (PSs)

Ralph Ketcham taught me how to think. As important, after reading a draft of my American Studies thesis, which was, well, discursive, he said to me, “You have to go for the jugular.” This remains the best piece of writing advice I’ve ever received, and it’s served me well throughout my career.

Michael Paller ’77 BA (AmSt)
Professor Ketcham wrote on one of my seminar papers “ugly sentence.” I was thoroughly chastised, especially because I knew when I wrote the sentence that it wasn’t well formed and I did not make the effort to reword it. I’ve worked harder at my writing ever since.

Karen Beckwith ’77 MA (PSc)/’82 PhD (PSc)

I was incredibly engaging, funny and kind and really for students. Just a great man who was wholly dedicated to teaching and students’ success.

Deborah Knudsen ’82 BA (AmSt)

I was in his graduate seminar expressing my frustration that the first Congress spent time arguing about the title of the president instead doing constructive things. To which Ralph Ketcham asked me a question that I remembered my entire academic career. “Didn’t they think it was important?” As he gently reminded me in 1973, any study of the past must begin with an understanding of what was valued in the past. Empathy and understanding must be the first steps in any historical investigation.

Robert Rupp ’75 MA (Hist)/’83 PhD (Hist)

I remember the marvelous two weeks that Dave Bennett and I shared with Ralph in Hungary in the summer of 1992, where we worked with high school social studies teachers, helping them make the transition to “teaching democratically.” While we devoted lots of time and focus (and fun) to our work with dozens of great Hungarian teachers, we also had some time to ourselves. I discovered what many others know: Ralph Ketcham was among the world’s greatest travelers and tourists. His enthusiasm and eagerness for meeting others and seeing the sights, and his energetic hiking through Budapest, were so much fun and so exhausting.

Ken Hilton ’72 MA (Hist)/’91 PhD (Hist)

I remember being invited once as a member of a small group to his apartment for wine and cheese, where I met his charming wife and felt privileged to be in such an intellectual family environment. . . . I profoundly regret not attending his celebratory event in 1997, because I would have liked to tell him what a positive influence he was to me in the often chaotic times of the mid-1970’s.

Bruce Ortwine ’75 BA (AmSt)

In the end, Ralph taught me that one could be a scholar and still be kind and supportive, that writing important books did not require making less time for students, and that one would be remembered as much for being a good person as for one’s achievements.

Michael Mezey ’69 PhD (PSc)

In a time when the understanding of our nation’s history and the people who made it is so important, Ralph Ketcham’s passing is all the more poignant.

Rick Smith ’72 BA (AmSt)

Remembrances of Ralph Received by Maxwell Since his Death on April 26

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Rick Smith ’72 BA (AmSt)
He was a wonderful teacher who asked questions in a way that allowed students to make connections and express insights we didn’t know we knew. The world is a little less kind, and a lot less enlightened, without him in it.

**Helen Bannan** ’73 (MSSc)/’76 PhD (SSc)

Ralph Ketcham taught me Cit 1 in 1959. He was my friend when I was still a child.

**Richard Bookstaver** ’63 BA (AmSt)

I recall when we moved to D.C. right after graduation in 1990 and we were getting started with our post-college life. Prof. Ketcham came to visit D.C. and we hosted him for dinner at our rental house. We ended up feeding an army of his former students because everyone wanted to see him!

**Theo Moll** ’90 BA (IR)

Shyly, I would visit him in his office, and ask a question now and then, especially in regard to modern writers. He was incredibly kind, almost avuncular, and loved to entertain my confused and querulous mind with thoughtful banter, placing his hand on his chin in a probing way, always asking me, “Well, what do you think about that?”

**Susannah (McClellan) Hilton** ’92 BA (Hist)

His was one of the first “facilitated” courses before that term was even in use. He would probe and prod and encourage our best thinking on the subjects at hand. He was truly the finest kind of teacher.

**Bruce Hamm** ’91 BA (PPhil)

His style was gentle, confident and caring as he did what only the best teachers can: walk with us on the path of learning and discovery, showing us enough to keep us questioning but not too much that we wouldn’t learn the lessons for ourselves. I count my time in his class an unexpected privilege of my graduate experience and one that has shaped all learning since.

**Jacob Stauber** ’11 MPA

He showed me that commitment to understanding government, public service, societal origins, elements and functions were keys to realization of individual and group growth. . . . My life and career has been quite the journey due in no small measure to his approach to blending analysis, clarity even within conflict, setting priorities and focusing action.

**Faith Hawley Howarth** ’58 BA (Soc)

He once told me and the class that if you understand the thoughts of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, you understand America. I have carried that with me going on almost 20 years. I hope James Madison and a few Anti-Federalists greet Professor Ketcham in Heaven.

**Brian Loy** ’01 MA (PSc)