

Recipients of the Hermann Boeschenstein Medal

1987 Anthony W. Riley, Queen's University

1988 Hans Eichner, University of Toronto

1989 Michael S. Batts, University of British Columbia

1992 Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, University of British Columbia

1998 Manfred Prokop, University of Alberta

2001 Robert H. Farquharson, University of Toronto

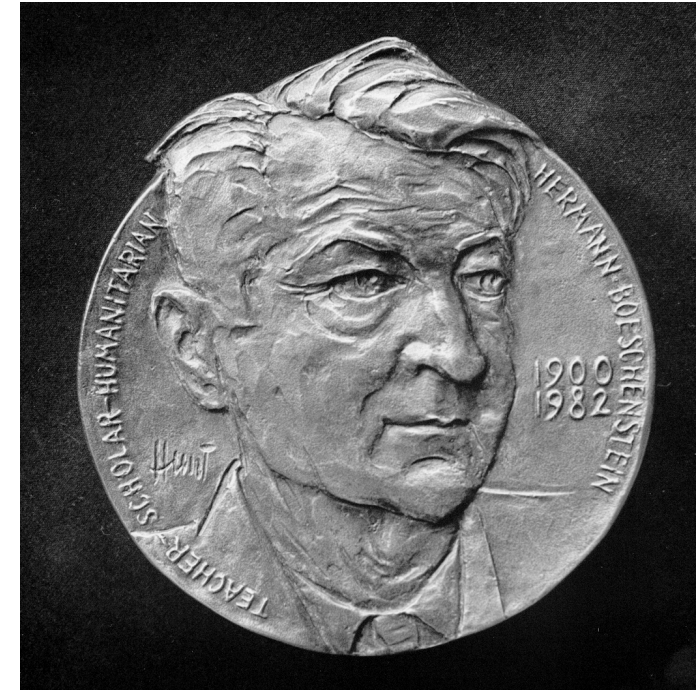
2001 Rodney T. K. Symington, University of Victoria

2008 Hermina Joldersma, University of Calgary

2011 Raleigh Whiting, University of Alberta

2012 David G. John, University of Waterloo

2015 Linda Dietrick, University of Winnipeg



The Hermann Boeschenstein Medal

The Hermann Boeschenstein Medal is the highest honour of the Canadian Association of University Teachers of German (CAUTG). Inscribed "Teacher - Scholar - Humanitarian," it commemorates one of Canada's most distinguished and beloved scholars of German. It is awarded from time to time to a person – normally a Germanist at a Canadian university – who has made exceptional contributions, in the humanitarian spirit of Hermann Boeschenstein, to the welfare of our Association and to the advancement of our discipline in Canada. The decision to confer the award is at the discretion of a selection committee appointed by the Directors of the CAUTG. It was first awarded in 1987 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Association.

About Hermann Boeschenstein (1900-1982)

Born in Stein am Rhein, Switzerland, Hermann Boeschenstein studied at the Universities of Kiel, Königsberg, and Berlin before receiving his doctorate at the University of Rostock in 1924 with a dissertation on the Swiss philosopher J.P. Crousaz. After trying his hand as a novelist and a journalist, he emigrated to Canada in 1926, returning briefly to Switzerland in 1928 to marry and bring back his wife. He began working at the University of Toronto as both a German teacher and a laboratory assistant at the Banting Institute. Then, from 1930 on, he taught in the Department of German, where he eventually became Head, succeeding Barker Fairley in 1956 and serving until his retirement in 1967. His publications include *The German Novel 1939-1944* (1949), books on Stehr and Keller, his two-volume magnum opus *Deutsche Gefühlkultur* (1954/1966), *German Literature of the Nineteenth Century* (1969), and numerous scholarly articles.

During the Second World War he was granted leave from teaching to work for the War Prisoners' Aid group of the YMCA. As its secretary, he travelled to the internment camps, assisting thousands of German prisoners of war throughout Canada. He helped them contact kin, supplied them with books, and intervened with officials on their behalf. After the war, many former POW's remembered his kindness and stayed in touch. He returned to teaching and research and also became deeply involved in cultural organisations that served the growing community of German-speaking immigrants. As one of his biographers has written, "his scholarly concerns from this time forth were informed by a belief in the need to disseminate his knowledge of the unbroken German tradition of civilized values that, he hoped, outweighed and overrode the temporary aberrations of history" (Rodney Symington, Introduction, *Selected Essays on German Literature*, by Hermann Böschenstein [NY: Lang, 1986] p. 10).

University of Toronto colleague Hans Eichner remembers Hermann Boeschenstein as "a wonderful and admirable colleague. He was extraordinarily well read, particularly of course in German literature, and he was an accomplished speaker who could be both very funny and very serious. . . . He is the only person I have ever known who could effortlessly, and without notes, quote prose. But there are many other good speakers and good scholars. What was unique about him was his unfailing kindness and generosity and his extraordinary ability to create the right atmosphere for good talk and intellectual comradeship. He gave great parties in his house, which was quite close to the U. of T., inviting the right people and providing unlimited quantities of Scotch; and at every conference he went to – I am thinking particularly of the annual gatherings of the CAUTG – he was the center around which people gathered and learned something and had a good time" (personal communication, Sept. 2000).

Anthony Riley, who while Head of the Queen's University German Department sponsored Hermann Boeschenstein for an honorary doctorate in 1968, also fondly remembers his conviviality and his "hollow leg." He will "go down in history not only as a fine Germanist and creative writer, but above all as a great humanitarian, whose warmth of personality made him the friend as well as mentor of countless students and many colleagues. I admired his intellect, his fairness, his camaraderie, his joviality, and his abiding love of literature and of his fellow human beings" (personal communication, 8 August 2000).

Michael Hadley (University of Victoria) writes: "I remember waiting on a bench outside the examination room on the day of my PhD defense at Queen's (Kingston) in 1971. . . . Footsteps echoing down the hall turned my attention to a dignified elderly gentleman in formal attire striding in my direction with a thesis under his arm. He was, of course, Hermann Boeschenstein, my external examiner. He had journeyed up from Toronto that morning and would be returning by train later in the day. 'And you must be the candidate', he said with an engaging smile. 'It's going to be just fine; it's an excellent piece of work.' Whereupon he disappeared into what my imagination had been conjuring up as the lion's den. Of course, the exam did go well. Except perhaps at the last when he turned to me and asked whether, after all the reading I had done, I could bear to read yet another 18th-century novel (the subject of my research). Perhaps fatigued after the morning's performance I hastily replied that I would forgo the pleasure for a while. Whereupon he presented me with a copy of a 17th-century novel entitled *Der akademische Roman*." This anecdote, Hadley suggests, "typifies how he dealt with students: generously, encouragingly, and always ready to recognize and reward." Yet there was more to it than simple kindness: "Dr. Boeschenstein was a humanitarian in the deepest sense of the word: concerned with human welfare, reaching out to those in real need. . . . His humanitarianism was nurtured not only by a wisdom that emerged from a broad and constantly growing intellectual culture, but by his Christian convictions about compassion and the innate dignity of human beings" (personal communication, 24 September 1999).

About the Medal

The Medal was commissioned by the CAUTG in 1986 from the distinguished Toronto sculptor and medalist Dora de Pédery-Hunt (1913-2008), who also designed the image of Queen Elizabeth II that appeared on Canadian coins from 1990 to 2003.

Linda Dietrick, May 2015