



Herbert Keith Russell

July 6, 1943 - February 28, 2026

IN MEMORY OF:

Herbert Keith Russell

Serving Location:

CRAIN PLEASANT GROVE-MURDALE FUNERAL HOME

31 Memorial Drive, Murphysboro, Illinois

Herbert Keith Russell, 82, of Carbondale passed away on Saturday, February 28, 2026.

Herb was born July 6, 1943, to Harold Russell and Velva Mae (Davison) Russell in Shelbyville, IL. He graduated in 1961 from Stewardson-Strasburg High School, Strasburg, IL. After receiving a B.S. degree in English from Eastern Illinois University (1964), he moved to Carbondale to study English and received both a M.A. degree (1966) and a PhD (1977) from Southern Illinois University. He taught in SIU's English Department for a few years and worked as an Editorial Writer and Technical Editor for the Coal Research Center before becoming the Executive Director for College Relations at John A. Logan College from 1985-2005.

Herb was a college teacher, editor, and writer as well as a literary scholar and Illinois historian. He has been acknowledged as the foremost authority on Edgar Lee Masters and published the definitive biography of Edgar Lee Masters (University of Illinois Press). He also contributed numerous articles on Edgar Lee Masters in scholarly journals and reference works, such as, the Encyclopedia of American Literature, Dictionary of Midwestern Literature, and the Dictionary of Literary Biography, American Poets, 1880-1945.

He loved Southern Illinois and wrote or edited several Southern Illinois University Press books which highlighted the beauty and resources of the area. These included A Southern Illinois Album: Photographs of the Farm Security Administration, 1936-1943; Southern Illinois Coal, A Portfolio; The State of Southern Illinois: An Illustrated History; and Fluorspar Mining: Photos From Illinois and Kentucky, 1905-1995.

Herb was often asked to speak at various conferences and meetings about his Masters research or the history of Southern Illinois. It was especially gratifying to have the SIU University Museum present an exhibition of photographs in 2013 from The State of Southern Illinois: An Illustrated History which featured not only his photos but those of Shannon Woodworth, David Hammond, and Brian DeNeal. This exhibit was repeated at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, Collinsville, IL.

He received many accolades throughout his life, most notably, the Newberry Library Fellow award and several Superior Achievement Awards from the Illinois State Historical Society.

Along with his scholarly pursuits, Herb enjoyed being outside and could often be found planting trees, clearing brush, or just walking his various properties with a cup of coffee in hand. He valued higher education and took pride in his daughter working for a Big Ten institution, the University of Iowa. Due to his

vast and varied knowledge, he was the team member everyone wanted for family Trivial Pursuit games.

Survivors include his wife of 57 years, Thyra K. Russell; daughter, Alicia Mae Joens and her husband, Justin Joens; grandson, Preston Joens; step grandson, Donald Joens and his wife Marcy and their daughters, Rose and Lila; brother, James Russell; sisters-in-law, Suva Vincent and Sharalee (Rick) Dowd; and nieces and nephews.

Along with his parents, he was preceded in death by his in-laws, John T. and Melba Mae Middlesworth, and his best friend, Larry Von Behren.

The family wishes to thank the doctors, nurses, and staff at the SIH Cancer Institute, Carbondale Memorial Hospital, and Manor Court (Bounce Back Program) for their support. Herb often commented on how well he was treated by his healthcare providers.

Memorials may be made to the Southern Illinois University Foundation, specifically, the SIU Press or Morris Library Special Collections Research Center.

Graveside service will be held at a later date.

Crain Pleasant Grove-Murdale Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Tribute Wall

LA

“ Dear Thyra and Family,
I am so terribly sad to hear of Herb's passing. He was a fantastic neighbor and friend. I always enjoyed running into him on walks and talking about nature and history. I am actually in the midst of rereading, *The State of Southern Illinois*, which is one of my treasured books and enjoyed reading some of his other works. He was always so kind and upbeat. He will be missed.
Lucia

Lucia Amorelli - March 16 at 02:32 PM

PC

“ Thyra, I am very sorry about Herb's passing. Please accept my condolences. Patty Cosgrove

Patty Cosgrove - March 05 at 04:19 PM

MH

“ It is sad to lose our friend Herb, he left the world a better place. He was always kind and I have never heard him say an unkind word about anyone. He would do what he could to help people, and he was so intelligent that he could answer any question that anyone put before him. If he didn't know the answer to something, he would find out in no time. But yet he was down to earth and was just himself. He left behind a wonderful Legacy that will live on.

Thyra, my prayers are with you and your family that you will find comfort and remember all the good times you have had together.

Maria Hardt - March 04 at 09:30 PM

AH

“ All of us in Special Collections will miss Herb very much. Thyra, you are in our thoughts.

Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm - March 04 at 03:36 PM

BF

“ Thyra, I'm very sorry to learn of herb's passing. He was a wonderful person, and I always thought very highly of him. He will be greatly missed. My heartfelt condolences and prayers go out to you and your family

Bob Fletcher

SS class of '61

Bob Fletcher - March 04 at 11:33 AM

PH

“ Always a generous supporter of preserving the history of Southern Illinois and SIUC library. I always appreciated his passion for history and his stories

Pam Hackbart-Dean

Pam Hackbart-Dean - March 03 at 07:17 PM

SW

“ Dr. Russell was an extremely smart person. Fact. But just as much, he was an extremely kind person. He and wife Thyra have contributed more to Southern Illinois than we will ever know.

Shannon Woodworth - March 03 at 03:49 PM

CK

I was Herb's office mate for a few years at SIU. WHAT FUN WE HAD. Herb introduced me to afternoon "constitutionals", post-lunch walks together to talk about our students, life, the future -- you name it. It was pure relaxation and joy for 30 minutes, a welcome part of the day. We grew to know each other as something beyond office colleagues, and boyoboy did I like and admire him. He could be farmboy humorous, having grown up in a house without indoor plumbing, and loved telling me stories about his youth. He had a sense of humor that one of his "distant" relatives on his wife Thyra's side, Sandy Middlesworth, would have loved. Herb and Sandy are now getting along in a better place. Sandy will teach Herb softball, and Herb will now teach Sandy some American literature. God bless you Herb, you are the best.

Carol Kelseykolojeski - March 04 at 06:45 PM

CK

Sent on carol's pc but actually from Paul.

Carol Kelseykolojeski - March 04 at 06:51 PM