MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR BOB HOFFMAN

As the last moments of our 60th Reunion of Cranbrook ‘49ers played out, we were in the midst of breakfast pancakes, coffee and all the fixings at the home of Kathleen and Walter Denison. For 30 or so folks, Walt and I were sort of a combination of cooks and waiters, trying to get the supply and demand into something approaching equilibrium. Walt turned to me and asked, “You going to Bob Hoffman’s memorial?” When I said yes, Walt shuffled us into his car.

The service at the Page Commons Room was packed, no standees, and as far as I could tell, we were the only ‘49ers there. The people cut across different categories -- male and female, faculty and staff, old and young friends. Presiding was John Winter, Dean of Boys, something like Bob’s next of kin as well as his steady visitor during Bob’s final years and moments. John’s a person whose integrity and deep character is so clear that when you see it, you have to enjoy it.

Only one prayer was offered, and so the event was not your typical religious occasion. Instead, John called on anyone who wanted to speak. That was it -- a series of different observations on Bob, his life and service. Many people offered insights that were poignant and penetrating. Barring only a couple of exceptions, of the 25 speakers, all had statements that were well-expressed, highlighting aspects of Bob that not all listeners would be aware of. It was, from my vantage point, a fine way to celebrate Bob Hoffman’s life and his total immersion in kids and schools.

One presentation stands out. John explained he had a Cranbrook ring that Bob had worn for decades. RKH’s initials were on it. Explaining that one person had paid long and faithful service to Bob in his last years, John then passed the ring on to Walt Denison. I don’t know if my classmate’s eyes were as wet as mine, but I was mighty appreciative of what Walt had done for the most senior member of our Class of ‘49.

The ending was the School Hymn. The gentleman who played it said, “If you want to sing, go ahead and do it.” Many of us did.

Before we returned to Walt’s house, the two of us took time to stop by Christ Church and see the placard marking Bob’s place of rest. At that point, the Reunion concluded.

Bob Leister