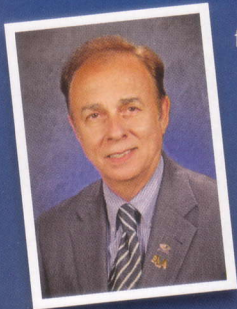


Preserving Papal History

— BY DAVID JAKIELO, A'05, GA'10 —

Catching Up With Stephen V. Russell



A special memento from one of the most recognized figures of the 20th century sparked Stephen V. Russell's passion for preserving relics of the past.

During John F. Kennedy's successful 1960 presidential campaign, he penned a personal letter to Russell, GA'74. That cherished keepsake inspired Russell to start collecting political, entertainment and sports artifacts, a collection that has grown to include an extensive assortment of papal memorabilia.

From unique pins and postcards to statues and medallions of popes dating back to the 19th century, his collection spans 11 papacies from Pius IX (1848) to Benedict XVI (2013). Although he hopes to add Pope Francis materials to his collection, he believes it will be challenging. In today's digital age, he says, manufacturers are less likely to produce tangible items such as buttons and postcards.

His passion for papal keepsakes has obvious roots.

"As a lifelong member of the Church, as a choir boy singing the Latin Mass and a solo rendition of *Ave Maria* at midnight Mass, it was a natural progression in my collecting zeal," explains Russell.

His most cherished item from the papal collection is a colored bust of Pope Pius X that he found in Montreal in the 1980s. The bust was created for the canonization of Pius X in 1954.

"The bust was in superb condition and the detail of the pope's face was almost life-like," says Russell. "The proceedings for the canonization in Rome caught the attention of many nations, especially Canada, where the bust was made."

While this and the rest of his collection are stored in his house, he is often asked to put items on display and serve as a speaker at educational conferences and community functions. Russell has even returned to

Duquesne to showcase his collections, including a display at a 2003 Cyril H. Wecht Institute of Forensic Science and Law forum on the assassination of President Kennedy.

"My collection would be meaningless if I was not able to share it with others," he says. "I am delighted that this vocation offers knowledge and enlightenment to others."

These opportunities allow Russell to continue his true passion of teaching, a gift he shared throughout his 42-year career in education, which started as an American history teacher at Monongahela High School. There, he often incorporated his collection of historical memorabilia to enhance the learning experience. The colorful exhibits helped bring history to life so that students could better understand a subject.

"Students who had been previously unmotivated showed marked increase in their knowledge and class participation," says Russell.

Although he retired as superintendent of the Belle Vernon Area School District last year, his life has been anything but restful.

In addition to increasing his collection and presenting at events, Russell works at Heinz Field, is an athletic event manager for the University of Pittsburgh and has held a position in the Pittsburgh Pirates ticket sales office since 1970. His late father, James William Russell, was a major league baseball player with the Pirates, Boston Braves and Brooklyn Dodgers. His father's days as a baseball player inspired the sports memorabilia portion of his collection.

When he thinks about the past, he can't help but think of his time at Duquesne. While many of his favorite professors have passed away, he remembers the late Dr. Joseph Maurice and Dr. Samuel Astorino as outstanding history teachers on our Bluff.

"These instructors influenced my teaching style with a dynamic approach to learning by preparation of the material before class showing the cause and effect of historical events," he explains.

He adds: "I have a great affection for Duquesne University and proudly display my ring on my right hand." ■

