

**George G. Heltai (1914-1994)**  
**History**

**1986 Distinguished Service Award**



Dr. George G. Heltai, a native of Hungary, joined the faculty of the College in 1967 as Professor of History. Until his retirement in 1986, he taught introductory courses in the history of modern Europe and advanced classes in the history of the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe.

Dr. Heltai was a witness and often a participant in some of the turbulent events of World War II, the post-war decade, and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. After earning doctorates in law and political science at the Royal Peter Pazmany, University of Hungary, in 1937, his teaching at the University was halted by the call to military service. "We were sent to the Russian front as shock troops," he once observed, "and few of us came back." Following the war, he served first as deputy, then as chief, of policy planning in the Hungarian foreign Ministry. As communist control grew tighter, he was arrested and spent five years in prison, nearly two of them in solitary confinement. Upon his release he did not resume his former work until the onset of the revolution against Soviet rule. When this movement was crushed, he and his family fled to Belgium, ultimately settling in the United States.

Dr. Heltai was chairman of the history department from 1967 to 1972 and again from 1978 to 1984. His character and incomparable experience made him the natural leader of that small group of senior faculty who helped guide the College from a small, private school to a large public university. He was a trusted advisor to four College presidents and a wise counselor to both colleagues and students. For all of his meritorious contributions to the vitality of the institution, he received the Distinguished Service Award in 1986. His greatest contribution, however, was his skill in stimulating students to think. When he retired as Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus, he was the last victim of the archaic rule that one must leave by age seventy-two.

In 2001 the history department established an annual award for the graduating senior with the highest academic distinction in this discipline. It honors Dr. and Mrs. Heltai "for their devotion to the students, the faculty, and the intellectual life of the College."