



Bruce Kellner

February 16, 2019

Bruce Kellner died of complications from Lewy body dementia on Saturday, February 16, 2019 at age 88. He is survived by his wife, Margaret; his children, Hans of Philadelphia and Kate Kellner Wilcox of Pittsburgh; his sister, Gloria Cameron of Houston, Texas; and many other family members and friends.

Bruce Kellner was born March 17, 1930 in Indianapolis, Indiana, and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, and Kansas City, Missouri. He served in the United States Navy for four years, 1951-1954. He graduated from Colorado College (BA) in 1955 and from The Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa (MFA) in 1958. He taught at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa (1956-1960), and at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York (1960-1969), where he was also director of theater activities and staged over thirty productions. He taught at Millersville University from 1969 until his retirement as Professor Emeritus of English in December 1991.

He taught primarily Shakespeare, poetry, and a course he devised and taught regularly titled "Literary Research and Analysis," which instructed students in how to avoid plagiarism, how to construct a Ciceronian essay, and the fundamentals of bibliography.

With his colleague, the late Hazel Jackson in the Millersville English

department, he established African American literature as a permanent offering in the English department curriculum, and with his colleague, Dennis Downey in Millersville history department, he established an annual Black History Month conference to which he invited several celebrated African American scholars.

In Millersville's exchange program with Iran in 1974, which brought 17 special education teachers to campus for training, he taught English as a Second Language (ESL). In 1986, he again taught ESL to international students during a semester at Warnborough College in England.

In 1968, Bruce Kellner published his first book, *Carl Van Vechten and the Irreverent Decades*, a biography of the American writer and photographer who had been his friend and mentor. During Kellner's tenure at Millersville, he published seven other books, including *The Last Dandy*, a biography of American artist Ralph Barton; *Content With The Example*, a reference work on the life and writings of Gertrude Stein; a bio-bibliography of American novelist, Donald Windham, and a major research work, *The Harlem Renaissance, A Historical Dictionary for the Era*; also, Van Vechten's bibliography and editions of his writings about black arts and letters.

In retirement, he edited the letters of American artist Charles Demuth for publication; also Carl Van Vechten's daybooks as *The Splendid Drunken Twenties* and Van Vechten's musical criticism as *Caruso's Mustache Off*; also *Kiss Me Again*, a memoir of several women who were influential on his life; and *What's For Dinner*, an anecdotal cookbook. He edited *The Major Works of Gertrude Stein* in 16 volumes for publication in Japan. At the age of 78, he published his first novel, *Winter Ridge*; a second novel followed in 2010, *The Prettiest Girls in Euphoria, Kansas*; and a third novel, *The Honesties of Love*, in 2012. He wrote the novels neither to sell nor to market but to see if he could write fiction. Some of his work has been translated into French, German,

Japanese, and Spanish.

Bruce Kellner wrote three one-character plays, all of which were produced, *Staying On Alone* (about Alice B. Toklas), starring the late Julie Harris at the Orleans Theater on Cape Cod; *Kiss Me Again* (about operetta star Fritzi Scheff), and *Swimming on Concrete* (about poet Vassar Miller) by the Theater of the Seventh Sister. He designed sets for the Lancaster Opera Company production of *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, and he acted in several productions of the Actors Company of Pennsylvania and the Performing Arts Workshop. Beginning in 2007 he compiled the material and directed local actors, in the first of nine annual programs on literary figures and kindred subjects for the Lancaster Literary Guild as recruitment “friendraisers” for members and their guests.

Also in retirement, he lectured widely at a number of museums, libraries, and other scholarly institutions, including the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian, Marquette University, Yale University, New York University, Chataqua, New York, Universite de la Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, the University of Vienna, the College of William and Mary, Northwest College, Iowa, Kirkwood College and Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the Muscarelle Museum in Charleston, the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, the Studio Museum of Harlem, the City College of New York, Lincoln University, West Chester University, Elizabethtown College, and locally on several occasions for Quest and Clio.

For 20 years Bruce Kellner was a member of Countermeasure, a quartet of working poets (Robert Desch, Mary Jean Irion, and Priscilla Oppenheimer were the other members) that gave occasional readings at Lebanon Valley College, The Independent Eye, Lawrenceville Academy and for various local organizations. Kellner never had the courage, he claimed, to send out his

poems for publication. But one of them is incised on a marble tombstone in the Heller Church yard in New Holland, Pennsylvania.

In 1998 Kellner and his friend, Franklin & Marshall classics professor Joel Farber, founded All Kinds Blintzes Press and produced 60 chapbooks during the following decade, in hand-sewn limited editions, of literary and historical subjects, to raise funds for various charitable causes. He was a board member of the Demuth Foundation for twelve years, edited its newsletter for ten years, curated three exhibitions, and twice co-chaired its annual auction. He was a member of the advisory committee to the Harvard African American Encyclopedia and to the Smithsonian's initial African American Museum Project. Last but not least, for two years he served as President of the P.T.A. for Buchanan Elementary School.

Kellner was Successor Trustee of the Carl Van Vechten Trust and raised nearly over \$100,000.00 from reproductions of Van Vechten's photographs for the Endowment Fund of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of Negro Arts and Letters in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. As Literary Trustee for his friend, novelist Donald Windham, he co-founded the Donald Windham-Sandy Campbell Fund, which grants annual awards of \$150,000 each to promising or proven writers, through Yale University.

In the Millersville Library's Special Collections, Kellner established photographic and literary archives in several fields: in the Carl Van Vechten Memorial Collection of African American Arts and Letters; in his collection of books and artifacts in connection with theater and dance; in the Margaret C. Woodbridge Collection of "Books By a Woman Writt"; and in a substantial archive of material by "Unread, Under-rated, Under-read, Maligned, Forgotten, Ignored, or Unknown Writers." In 2013, Millersville in turn honored Kellner by adding his name to that of former librarian Esther Whitely to identify the Reading Room for Special Collections in the McNairy Library. The Bruce Kellner-Monadnock annual literary award was named in Kellner's honor by his

former student, poet and editor Rodger Martin. Kellner deposited his published and unpublished papers in Special Collections of the McNairy Library at Millersville.

Bruce Kellner was a lover of arts and letters who enjoyed what he was doing most of the time. He was an incessant reader, although his tastes were eccentric and unconventional. (He regretted his inability ever to read all of *Paradise Lost* or *War and Peace* or *Finnegan's Wake*.) He was only religious about music, which fed his heart, and grammar, prosody, and punctuation, which fed his head. He did not fear death, and he took solace in knowing that we die whenever we fall asleep and do not know it when we do not awaken. He considered the Roman poet Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* more reliable than any sacred text for anybody having a hard time coming to terms with death.

In old age, he came to believe that he had led a charmed life, because coincidences – which accounted for almost all of his good luck– had occurred so often that they ceased to surprise him. He considered his children his only genuinely significant achievement. He liked to say that he got a good deal out of life, maybe more than was in it.

Cremation will be conducted privately. In lieu of flowers, Kellner suggested that donations might be made in his memory to the Demuth Foundation or the Lancaster Public Library.

A memorial will be held on Saturday, April 6, 2019 at Homestead Village, 1800 Village Circle, in the Glasford Room, at 11 am.

Previous Events

Service
APR 6. 11:00 AM (ET) Homestead Village Lancaster, PA

Tribute Wall



“Bruce, you were the heart of the Hartwick English Department... and The Cardboard Alley Players in the mid-to-late 60's. You were so missed after your successes in the publishing world... when you moved back to the Midwest. We were so fortunate to be touched by your imagination, creativity, and love of teaching. Our lives "are rounded by sleep"... The dreamers of this new generation still need all you gave to us so gracefully.

George van Laethem - September 23, 2023 at 06:14 PM

EW

“I only knew Dr. Kellner through correspondence and telephone conversations about the Van Vechten literary estate. Dr. Kellner was a kind and generous soul. I'm sad to see he's gone, but happy for his family and friends to have enjoyed his company, modesty, and genius for so long. (Have a note to get Lucretius and appreciate that parting gift of good advice.) Elizabeth Moore Willingham—Waco, Tx, Baylor U (retired)

Elizabeth Willingham - October 06, 2022 at 05:54 PM

BL

“One of my mother's dearest friends! He was wonderful to her. I treasure the memory of their friendship.

Margaret Woodbridge's daughter, Barbara

barbara Lieberman - September 15, 2020 at 07:08 PM

MB

“ Bruce Kellner was definitely one of the best professors ever. He had such a positive influence on so many students at Hartwick College. He loved working with the Cardboard Alley Players. He inspired and challenged the students. One of my favorite people . So glad to have had him in my life.

mary ann hrosenchik bridgman - April 27, 2020 at 04:15 PM

MS

“ Bruce Kellner was one of the best professors I ever had. He challenged us in ways others didn't. He also directed brilliant play productions. A great man.

Margaret K Schramm - August 01, 2019 at 03:36 PM

HK

“ 25 files added to the album Memories Album



Hans Kellner - March 20, 2019 at 11:29 AM

MW

“What a life force he was..in the classroom, in his books that started with Carl Van Vechten, in his directing of so many college plays and, for me, in his wonderful interpretations of Shakespeare. His most precious gift to me (during my four years at Hartwick College) was how to "unlock" the meanings in the Shakespeare plays, a skill I enjoy to this day. I hope that Margaret, Kate and Hans can take comfort in knowing how many countless lives he altered forever by sharing his his world with us.

Mike Watt - March 11, 2019 at 08:28 PM

IN

I served in the US Navy with Bruce during the Korean War. We became fast fiends. He was a wonderful friend and I will forever cherish his friendship!

Irvin nissen - November 09, 2019 at 05:27 PM

GF

“I worked with Professor Kellner at Hartwick College. It was only about twenty minutes of direction, but I got more information and confidence in that short time. He was overseeing the late Bill Edes's production of "The Happy Haven" and I was Mr. Golightly and it required me to do a few dance steps. I felt so safe and grateful for the help he gave me. I have missed him all these years.

Glen Fitch - March 07, 2019 at 12:56 PM

PL

“ Bruce and I always talked about how Millersville has changed since he was a professor there. I updated him about the new student developments at Millersville, which he always chuckled. Bruce reminded me that it is always important to sit and reminisce about the good times. Even though I only knew you for a short while, you made a huge impact on this student.

Your family is in my thoughts and prayers.

Phoebe Liew - March 06, 2019 at 12:35 AM

KW

“ Superb portrait of adult you with your father, Kate, and the others as well -- including that freshfaced lad in uniform! Your aunt Annie shared a few Kellner family photos with me over the past fifteen years. She adored you all, and admired your Dad so much. My deepest sympathy to you, your brother, and of course to your Mom whom I've been blessed to meet and am glad to have as an fb friend.

~ Kit in Canada

Kit Wilson-Pote - March 02, 2019 at 03:34 PM

BR

“ Genuine sympathy from a fellow Downtowner. Bruce certainly left his mark on the World. He seems to have touched many lives.

Sincerely, Bonita Reed

Bonita Reed - February 28, 2019 at 11:41 AM

KW

“ 4 files added to the album Memories Album



Kate Kellner Wilcox - February 27, 2019 at 11:39 AM

JF

“ *Bruce was such an inspiring colleague when we worked together on our chapbooks. He always had new ideas and saw problems that I had missed. Beyond that, he was a great, great friend for almost 40 years, discussing art and literature and films and cuisine with me in stimulating ways. I will never forget him. From North Carolina I send hugs and kisses to Margaret and to Kate and Hans.*

—Joel Farber



Joel Farber - February 27, 2019 at 08:45 AM