



the
Lesbian,
Gay,
Bisexual and
Transgender

Religious Archives Network

A resource center and information clearinghouse
for the history of LGBT religious movements.

Tribute to Ken Rowe

By Joanne Carlson Brown

April 16, 2004

Chicago Theological Seminary

It is my pleasure and privilege to introduce Ken Rowe on the occasion of his retirement. Ken has been one of the people that has inspired me as an historian. He was always available to help younger scholars with encouragement and real practical helps in the form of leads on where to look for information and hints at how they might be interpreted.

Ken was educated at Drew University (B.A. and Ph.D.), Yale (M. Div.), and Rutgers (M.L.S.). He is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. He has taught church history and directed the Methodist Research Library at Drew Theological School from 1970 to 2004. I remember coming to the Archives when it was first opened and getting a tour from Ken and seeing all the cool artifacts like Wesley's death mask. What can I say? Sometimes we historians are a bit morbid. His help was invaluable as I was working on my dissertation on Jennie Fowler Willing, a 19th century Holiness woman and church reformer. Her brother was Bishop Charles Fowler and it was a great suggestion to look at things about him to gain an insight into Jennie and her family life growing up.

Ken has published several books in collaboration with colleagues: *Methodist Experience in America*, which is an invaluable source book of primary sources for the study of Methodism; *United Methodism in America*, a compact history that is a great resource for lay people wanting to know more about Methodist history; and *Perspectives on American Methodism*. The fact that these were written in conjunction with other scholars shows Ken's true spirit of collegiality and his commitment to the concept that a community of scholars working together can achieve more than a single individual working alone. His research bibliographies (Methodist Union Catalogue pre-1976 and United Methodist Studies, basic bibliographies, 4 editions) are invaluable resources for finding a book or article you did not know existed and have been important tools for scholars and amateur historians alike. They once again show his careful scholarship and research ability. He is currently working on a book about Methodist architecture.

In the late 1970s, Ken promoted a plan to develop a national Methodist historical center at Drew University, promoted the plan among university leaders and successfully won the search for a permanent home for the United Methodist General Commission on Archives and History. The United Methodist Archives and History Center, combining the research collections of the university and the church, opened on Drew's campus in 1981. I was there at the opening and can attest to the pride felt by all in attendance. It forms one of the most comprehensive research collections of the Wesleys and the world family of Methodist Churches. Ken continued as librarian for the new center until his retirement in 2003.

But more important for us tonight, along with Rick Huskey, Ken helped found the national Affirmation (United Methodists for LGBT Concerns) Archives at Drew University in 1989. Ken has been one of the true pioneers in pushing for our records to be preserved and available for others to read and study. He knew that this was a crucial area of research and was tireless and, yes, very pushy and nagging relentlessly to getting all the records he could. As a result, the Affirmation Archives are the most comprehensive of all the collections of LGBT religious organizations or individuals. He is truly one of the pioneers in this field.

Ken knows how to take all the basic stuff of life and make it special. From his collection of antique cars to his kitchen that looks like an altar to the boots lining the wall of his bedroom to his warm and cozy house filled with wood, books and a fireplace to his love of all things leather, he is a man of many talents and loves. He is extremely happy to be retired for it gives him not only time to do the things he loves, like going on bike trips and visiting with his mom and friends, but has also freed up his life and soul. His partner of twenty-one years, James Sawyer, has sustained him in all his work—he is Ken's reservoir. Ken has ministered to his friends over the years, keeping many from going over the deep end at times—being there to listen, to hold them and to plant flower beds for them.

The list of Ph.D.'s he has supervised is lengthy and speaks volumes of the kind of teacher and person Ken is. He is an amazing person who can balance all these aspects of life.

He may have been partnered to James for twenty-one years, but, in a very real sense, he has been partner of every LGBT United Methodist person who has wondered about their history, who looked to see if there were any others like them now and especially before. He has made sure that United Methodist LGBT folks have access to and know their history. Thanks to Ken we know our roots and can use those deep roots to grow and spread our branches wide. Thanks to Ken, no one can take away our identity as sons and daughters of not only God, but of John Wesley as well. And for that I am truly grateful.