

Arthur John Harris (Jack), Ph.D., Shakespearean and Historic Preservationist, Dies

Jack Harris, of Lake Ann, Michigan and Ypsilanti, Michigan, died of an aortic aneurysm on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010 in The University of Michigan hospital, ER. He is best known as a Shakespeare scholar, a land conservator, and as an historic preservationist.

Jack Harris was born in Chicago, Illinois, March 6, 1929, to Arthur John and Lillian (O'Keefe) Harris and was brought up at Lake Ann, Benzie County, Michigan. He attended one-room schoolhouses until entering Honor Rural Agricultural School where Thelma Swiler and Miss Burke were his favorite and most influential teachers. In 1947, he graduated from Traverse City High School, where Miss Pagel (English) and Miss Kennedy, director of Arsenic and Old Lace, were his most influential teachers. He graduated from Central Michigan University, 1951, with a Bachelor of Science Degree, majoring in biology with minors in history and English. While attending CMU, Dr. Olive Hutchinson Krees and Dr. Mary Mathison Wills were most influential.

From 1951-1954, Jack taught at Reed City High School, before being awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship for High School teachers, particularly for his work with students in the theatre. Ultimately, it was Dr. Wills, his former CMU professor, who convinced him to "get on the boat" (for England) as soon as possible. The Ford Fellowship led to Jack studying at The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, at Stratford-upon-Avon, 1954-1956, under the direction of Professor Allardyce Nicoll. In 1959, under the supervision of Reg Hill, he completed his MA by writing a stage history of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, as it had been performed at the Memorial Theatre at Stratford. This study clarified Poel's use of his Elizabethan stage, his methods of production, and his approach to interpretation of a Shakespearean play - all of which are essential to our full appreciation of Poel's contribution to theatre practice in the twentieth century. Jack's greatest pleasures during that period, however, were attending the theatre, where he saw multiple performances of such greats as Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Peggy Ashcroft, Edith Evans, and Paul Scofield; visiting the great houses of Britain; and living one full year in a sixteenth-century thatched cottage, where he tended the garden.

Upon returning to Michigan, he accepted a position at Arthur Hill High School in Saginaw, Michigan as an English instructor, where, among his other accomplishments, he produced a classroom production of Act I of Hamlet so successfully that the administration had it performed before the entire student body. He also presented a full-scale production of Twelfth Night for the public.

The completion of his MA as well as his accomplishments as a high school teacher led to his being hired by his alma mater, CMU, where he taught with many of his former professors. However, two years later, he returned to the Institute at Stratford to begin work on the Ph.D. There he wrote his dissertation, "King Lear in the Theatre: A Study of the play Through the Performances of Garrick, Kean, Macready, Irving, Gielgud, and Scofield" under the direction of John Russell Brown. Besides recording performances of these great and distinguished thespians as King Lear, this dissertation was an analysis of the play to discover Shakespeare's aim for its impact upon an audience. The entire dissertation, including an appendix and bibliography, comes to 458 pages. He was granted the Ph.D. in 1966. Besides his MA thesis and Ph.D. dissertation, Jack also published numerous articles offering analyses and interpretations of theater productions

of Shakespeare's plays. Some of his more recent publications include: "Ophelia's 'Nothing': 'It Is the False Steward that Stole His Master's Daughter,'" in Hamlet Studies, 1997; Jessica's Bawdy "Interlude" in The Merchant of Venice (with Frankie Rubinstein) in English Language Notes, December 2004; "Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice" in The Explicator, Winter 2004 (with Frankie Rubinstein). In 1999, "Garrick, Colman, and King Lear: A Reconsideration", Shakespeare Quarterly, Winter 1971 was selected as one of the most influential publications on Shakespeare in the twentieth century and reprinted in Shakespeare: The Critical Complex Shakespeare in the Theater edited by Orgel and Keilen. Jack taught briefly at The University of Michigan while completing his dissertation, and in 1967, he moved to a permanent position at Eastern Michigan University, where he became a full professor and ultimately, at age 65, Professor Emeritus.

Jack was an avid gardener, and he developed a lush "English Garden" on his property in Ypsilanti, Michigan. He was also the only male member of a small but enthusiastic garden club in Ann Arbor, Michigan for many years.

One of Jack's primary missions in life was to preserve Harris Point on Lake Ann, the core of a larger property left by his grandfather. In 2007, he accomplished this by placing a conservation easement on the property with Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) so that Harris Point would never be developed and will forever remain, as Jack knew it.

Besides land preservation and scholarship in Shakespeare, Jack was also a dedicated historic preservationist. In 1974, he and his partner Clifford Larkins moved from Ann Arbor, Michigan into a house in Ypsilanti built circa 1870. Their home has more than once been on Home Tour. It has even been the site of one notable wedding (the ceremony conducted by Mayor Clyde King): the marriage of Jane Bird, long-time chair of the Historic District Commission (HDC) and the architect Denis Schmediecke. Not long after moving to Ypsilanti, Jack began in earnest to devote his after-hours energies to historic preservation. First, he joined the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation. Soon he was editing the Foundation's "Newsletter", later "Heritage News". Then he held the position of Foundation president for many years, attending local, state, and national preservation conferences and using every means to promote preservation in Ypsilanti. He alerted preservation-conscious students at Eastern Michigan University to start a campaign to save an historic campus building, Welch Hall. Jack wrote letters, presented proposals, and helped turn the University around in terms of preserving its heritage. Many credit him for saving the Becker-Stachlewitz House, which now belongs to EMU. In 2002, he was awarded the "Special Recognition Award" from the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation for his life-long commitment to historic preservation in that community.

His partner of 40 years, Clifford Larkins; his three brothers Bill, Tom, and Jim; and numerous nieces and nephews survive Jack. All who knew Jack will miss his brilliant mind, his dedication to historic preservation, and his warm, gentle, and open spirit. A celebration of his life will be held on May 8, 2010 at 11:00 AM at Quirk Theatre on Eastern Michigan University campus in Ypsilanti, MI. In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation at 301 N. Grove, Ypsilanti, MI, 48197 or to the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy at 3860 N. Long Lake Rd., Ste. D, Traverse City, MI 49684 tel: 231.929.7911.