

# Kermit Carlyle Parsons

*July 15, 1927 — December 9, 1999*

Kermit Carlyle Parsons, 72, died peacefully in his sleep at home on December 9, 1999. A few days earlier, he became Professor Emeritus of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University where he taught for more than forty years. He received a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Miami University of Ohio in 1951, and a Master of Regional Planning degree from Cornell in 1953. For the next four years, he worked for the Cleveland City Planning Commission, rising to become head of the Community Planning Section.

Kermit (K.C.) returned to Cornell in 1957 as Assistant Professor, becoming Associate Professor three years later. In 1965, he was appointed Chairman of the Department of City and Regional Planning and promoted to Professor. He also served as Visiting Professor in the graduate program in planning at the University of Puerto Rico and as a Visiting Lecturer at the School of Architecture, University of the Philippines.

In 1971, he became Dean of the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning, a position he held for nine years. It was not easy to be dean of a chronically under-funded college occupying crowded, obsolete buildings and where the requests from four independent-minded departments always far exceeded available resources. K.C. not only emerged intact and unbowed but with several significant achievements.

Dean Parsons began the first concerted college effort to obtain significant outside financial support. He succeeded in attracting the interest of Olive Tjaden, an architectural alumna, and it was her bequest that made possible the complete renovation of Franklin Hall with modern facilities for the Department of Art.

He was equally successful in his meetings with Aline Stein, the widow of the pioneering architect-planner, Clarence Stein. At her death some years later, she left the college a generous fund to support the Stein Institute for Urban and Landscape Studies. This provides a continuing source of research and travel grants, conference support, and a publications program in city planning, and urban and landscape design.

In 1979, he was instrumental in establishing and supporting the Architecture Program in Washington. This made it possible for students to spend a semester participating in design studios and related courses focused on projects in the national capital. The university's later Cornell-in-Washington Program drew on this experience as did the college's present Rome Program.

Under his leadership, the two departments of planning that had resulted from a division of the former single department amicably united to again become the Department of City and Regional Planning. It was to that growing department that he returned to teach, a position that deans with long tenure sometimes find difficult. K.C.'s transition to full-time studio and classroom activities could not have been more successful, as his colleagues and students were quick to note and appreciate.

From 1985-88, he directed the university's Cornell-in-Washington Program. This provided further opportunities to pursue his studies of urban planning projects in Washington and Baltimore, work begun earlier with grants from the Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Foundation and as a Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars where he examined urban policy making in the executive branch of the federal government. Returning to his department, he taught until his retirement in 1999.

K.C. published over 50 journal articles, consulting and research reports, monographs, and books on university campus planning, urban renewal, downtown planning, national urban policy and the history of urban planning. Recognizing the merit of his research and writing, several organizations supported his efforts with grants. In addition to those mentioned above, they included the Ford Foundation, National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, the Graham Foundation, and the Aline MacMahon Stein Fund.

He was a long-time member of the Society of Architectural Historians, American Planning Association, American Institute of Certified Planners, Urban Land Institute, National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, and the American Institute of Architects, among others.

His book, *The Cornell Campus: A History of its Planning and Development* (1968), became a model for those preparing similar studies of other colleges and universities. He was instrumental in founding the Society for College and University Planning and was its president from 1966-68. A more recent book was *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein: Architect of the Planned Community*, a volume of selected and profusely annotated letters and other writings.

More than a dozen of his articles and conference papers were on aspects of Stein's work and were to be chapters in a book on this influential architect-planner, a work that his colleagues hope to see through to publication. Another book may also appear: the edited papers presented in September 1998 at the international conference K.C. organized at Cornell to mark the centennial of the publication of Ebenezer Howard's garden city concept.

An important part of his career was professional practice. He was Planning Consultant for the City of Cleveland and several architectural firms in that city, Wayne State University, the New York State University Construction Fund, the Mid-Hudson Patterns for Progress, the Chemung Valley Study of Higher Education, and as an expert witness in cases involving planning issues. He was also active in efforts to preserve at Cornell the buildings of earlier eras.

K.C. served as Consultant to the Philippine Ministry of Education on a campus plan of the Miagao campus of the University of the Philippines and in Puerto Rico on the Rio Peidras campus planning program for the University of Puerto Rico. For the Department of State, he traveled to Nigeria to advise on the projected University of Ife, and for the World Bank, he provided advice on the design of agricultural markets in Mexico and in Seoul, Korea.

An avid reader from early childhood, K.C. became an equally avid book collector. His extensive library on architecture and planning included all of the standard works and a number of rarities. He was equally successful in assembling a very large collection of books, maps, and prints on London, a city he knew well and loved. Somewhat smaller but highly selective groups of small press volumes and books by and about Ruskin were among the other treasures that graced the shelves of the library wing he had recently added to his house.

It was there that he spent his last weeks, visiting with colleagues, and students who came to say farewell. His life touched them all, and they will never forget the confidence and poise that characterized his life and the courage and composure with which he faced his death.

*Stuart S. Stein, Roger T. Trancik, John W. Reps*