

Gerald B. Kelley

June 24, 1928 — December 7, 1987

Gerald B. Kelley came to Cornell in 1963 from the University of Wisconsin, where he had received a Ph.D. and had become chair of the Departments of Linguistics and Indian Studies. His previous educational experience was in and about Boston, and he was particularly fond of recollecting his days at Boston Latin School, from which he graduated in 1945. Throughout his career he remembered his Latin School lessons well, frequently citing passages from Greek, Latin, and English literature and, in rare lapses of memory, reminding his interlocutors that a true gentleman should have at least forgotten his Greek.

Gerry spent several years in India, where he loved to be, and of which he had a deep and broad knowledge. He played an important role in training scholars and in helping to establish centers of linguistics. He was a Rockefeller Fellow in India from 1957 to 1959 and while there taught in the summer schools of linguistics that were so significant in training the leading and now senior linguists of India, as well as a large number of their American counterparts in Indian linguistics. With the late Gordon H. Fairbanks, also of Cornell, he helped to establish, under the auspices of the Ford Foundation, the Linguistics Department of the University of Delhi, which remains one of the most active centers of linguistics in India. He was most closely associated with Hyderabad, however, where he was instrumental in establishing the distinguished department at Osmania University.

As Telegu was the primary area of his own research, he visited there on many occasions for short or long periods. A large proportion of the linguists there were his students or his close colleagues. His services at Osmania have now been recognized by a series of endowed annual lectures on linguistics in his name, testifying to the high regard and affection in which he was held.

In addition to his professional linguistic interests, Gerry was especially engaged by anachronistic remnants of the Raj, as he was by anachronism in general, not without a characteristic mixture of affection and detachment. He had a keen observer's eye for imperial remnants and their extensions and transformations in independent India, of which he provided vivid and lively characterizations to many an engaged audience. He particularly treasured his membership in the Secunderabad Club, where the regimental insignia and portraits of the military commanders are displayed in a series unbroken from the nineteenth century to the present; the only detectable difference since independence was that those regiments, and the commanders, are now Indian. He, with his wife Helen, was working on a book on decorative motifs displayed on antique cannon found in India. A drawing by Peter Kahn of

one of these designs appears on the bookplate which will be appended to the books acquired through the Gerald B. Kelley Memorial Book Fund of the Cornell University Library.

At Cornell, Gerry taught courses in general linguistics and sociolinguistics as well as south Asian linguistics, and in recent years also taught a course on the history of English. He also was in charge of instruction in Hindi and Telegu, and conducted Hindi examinations under the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs.

His earlier articles are on Telegu, and especially phonology, but the work for which he is most often cited is his paper on "The Status of Hindi as a Lingua Franca", which was a pioneering contribution to Indian sociolinguistics utilizing census data in a careful but imaginative way. Much of his subsequent work had to do with sociolinguistic problems with special reference to India, and at the time of his death he was working on a general book on sociolinguistics. He was also engaged in research, in tune with his other interests, on the language of the log of an East Indiaman in the first half of the last century.

Gerry Kelley served on several occasions as director of the South Asia Program and the South Asian Center at Cornell. He was also present at the founding of the American Institute of Indian Studies, of which Cornell is a charter Class A member, and served several terms as a trustee of that consortium, which is the major funding source and conduit of funding for American scholars in Indian studies, facilitating research and conducting language programs. He also served on its language committee and at the time of his death was an elected member of the Executive Committee.

From 1971 to 1975 Gerry served as chairman of the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, an organization founded in 1946 as the Division of Modern Languages and headed at that time by J Milton Cowan. Gerry was thus responsible for the success of that transition from a division to a department, as well as being in charge of the complete renovation of the building that housed it, Morrill Hall. It was under Gerry Kelley's chairmanship that Morrill Hall came to be devoted in its entirety to Modern Languages and Linguistics.

Gerry was a person singularly lacking in malice, but with a capacity for outrage, which was triggered by perceived injustice and particularly by what he perceived as exploitation or victimization of the less powerful. He possessed a lively and penetrating sense of humor, often at his own expense and never mean, which found an outlet in his capacity for animated and colorful expression and the precise turn of phrase. These characteristics along with his mastery of the anecdote as an art form, made him a delightful companion as well as a supportive colleague.

He was immensely gregarious and his pleasure in friends was mixed with his delight in language. His sport and his pastime was free-wheeling conversation, and any flash of wit, or unexpected figure of speech, his own or another's, brought an almost physical joy. He was a great raconteur, and this gift was fed by an almost photographic memory. His gently skeptical view of life was at the heart of his humor, keeping him alive to the possibilities for absurdity lurking in the most conventional of situations. Something of this quality caused him to treasure a poem of Archilochus which he kept in the Greek original on his office wall. In it a warrior laments the loss of his shield to a barbarian, but brightens immediately at the thought that, after all, he survived the battle and can always buy another one just as good.

James W. Gair, Stanley J. O'Connor, Richard L. Leed