



Larry Rowen Remele: A Biographical Sketch

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Since 1989 the Northern Great Plains History Conference had selected an annual recipient of the Larry Rowen Remele Award. The council created the award in 1988 only several months after Remele's death to perpetuate his memory and to honor an individual who exemplified his outstanding dedication and contributions to the NGPHC.

Larry Rowen Remele (22 April 1945-03 June 1988) was born in Baltimore, Maryland, to Leonard and Esther Remele (nee Kurle). The family moved to Valley City, North Dakota, where Larry went to public schools and graduated from the Valley City High School.

Larry attended Valley City State University before transferring to North Dakota State University where he completed his bachelor's degree. In 1969 he finished a Master's degree in American History and American Literature at the University of North Dakota. Subsequently, he did some post-graduate study at Northern Illinois University (DeKalb).

In 1973 Larry began his fifteen-year career with the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Throughout that time he served as editor of the quarterly journal *North Dakota History* and as state historian. In 1985 he was assigned the additional duty of heading the society's Educational and Interpretation Division.

As editor Larry noticeably improved the scholarly professionalism of *North Dakota History*. He worked hard to attract well-researched articles by recognized historians and edited with a judicious hand. Under his leadership, the Educational and Interpretation Division sponsored outreach programs including talks, conferences and symposia. Larry strove to make history more accessible and meaningful to the public.



Despite his heavy work demands, Larry created time to do personal research and writing. His special interest was North Dakota's Nonpartisan League and its founder Arthur C. Townley. His study "The Lost Years of A.C. Townley (after the Nonpartisan League)" (1988) was published by the North Dakota Humanities Council. By the time of his death, Larry was recognized as one of the leading scholars on the nonpartisan movement that first revolutionized North Dakota politics during the WWI era.

His close friends accurately described Larry as a friendly, unpretentious man with a social conscience. His social activism included participating in the March on Washington for Peace in Vietnam, 27 November 1965. During his long affiliation with North Dakota's Democratic-NPL party he served as chairman of its rules committee for several years.

Although he had a quiet demeanor, Larry had a knack for making friends. In his obituary then state tourism director James Fuglie hyperbolically stressed that aspect by stating that Larry "had a million friends." (*Bismarck Tribune*, 04 June 1988). A group estimated at 150-200 turned out to celebrate his 40th birthday.

During his time with the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Larry regularly participated in the NGPHC annual conferences. Because he was recognized as one of the conference's leading promoters, Larry was invited to join the group that formed the Northern Great Plains History Conference Council at the 1986 meeting in Eau Claire. At this initial meeting, his colleagues chose him to be council chair. In that position he was principally responsible for writing a conference operating policy, which he presented at the Sioux Falls conference in 1987. At that time the general expectation of council members was that Larry would continue as chair for a long as he chose.

His tenure was ended by his sudden death. About 7:30 in the morning of 03 June 1988, his wife, Anne Rathke, found him passed out in his home study. He was pronounced dead shortly after being taken by ambulance to a Bismarck medical center. Since he was in apparently good health, his death shocked all who knew him. Later, it was revealed that he had childhood rheumatic fever, which evidently



damaged his heart valves. Larry was survived by his wife and daughter, Rachel Dakota, his parents and two sisters.

J. Michael McCormack, one of Larry's close friends, noted that Larry's funeral was held on the grounds of the state historical society's Heritage Center. "This, I believe, was a singular honor granted to him in honor of his work in North Dakota history, and the high regard he was held in by his colleagues at the Heritage Center." (J. Michael McCormack to William E. Lass, 16 July 2015.)