

**Remembering Jack Temple Kirby**  
**November 6, 2009**  
**Southern Historical Association Meeting**  
**Louisville, Kentucky**

I would like to add another perspective to what has been said about Jack Kirby tonight and speak about his life in the Department of History at Miami University, Jack's professional home for some thirty-five years. I worked with Jack Temple Kirby for over a decade and it was a pleasure to be his colleague, to greet him in the hallway at 8AM, or in the mailroom where he stopped each day after lunch. He was a wonderful presence in the department—generous, smart, a connector rather than a divider.

Life is complicated and Jack Kirby was a complicated man, but he had four abiding and straightforward loves: First, Jack adored his family—Valerie and Matt, you put stars in his eyes and every time he spoke of you and that was often, his chest swelled with pride. Constance, his love for you sustained and delighted him 24/7.

Second, he loved the South and all things southern, down to the last gene in his genome. You know this from his writings and it has been confirmed once again in his Presidential address that Barbara Fields read so beautifully this evening.

Third, Jack loved, hated, railed against, lived, breathed and devoted his life to the academy. In faculty meetings he always sat in the same wingback chair in the McNiff Room on the second floor of Upham Hall on the Miami campus. Jack would usually say little—initially, but then toward the middle of a meeting, or an argument, he would sit up straight and speak out in that deep voice of his. And when he spoke he put things in context, he guided, he led, and more often than not, he made things right. He did not always win, but he always spoke out in ways that mattered. When he decided to retire almost a decade ago now, we, his colleagues, missed him immediately and often, and now more than ever.

Finally, Jack Temple Kirby loved life itself. He lived large, loving good bourbon and the occasional smoke, the mockingbird, the land, the marsh, and the sea.

When I heard that Jack had died on August 6<sup>th</sup> I thought a lot about how wonderful it was that he had not waited to do what he wanted to do, to do what he loved. He made deliberate choices that shaped the last years of his life—years that we all wish could have stretched on much longer.

He chose his love Constance Pierce; he chose to retire a little early, after many, many years of good teaching and writing at Miami University; he and Constance chose to live in St. Augustine, a careful and deliberate decision to find a beautiful place to live, to work, to write.

Jack left us much—in his generous way—his eloquent books, his wonderful family, the thousands of students he taught, the hundreds of vivid stories he told, and many rich memories of a life well lived.

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