



The Leather Times

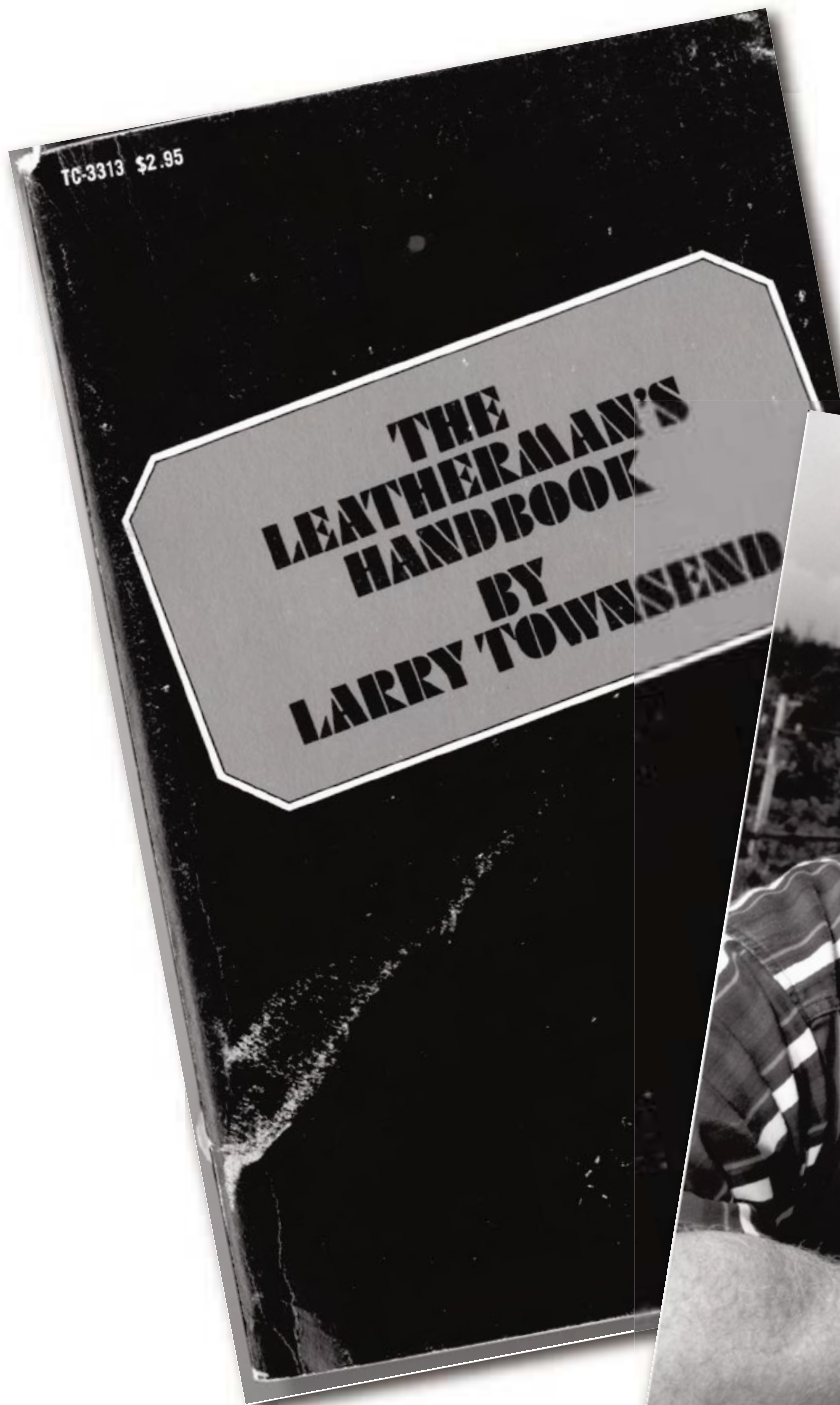
News from the Leather Archives & Museum

No. 2, 2008

**Leather Authors:
Jack Fritscher Memorializes
the Legendary Larry Townsend**

Wisconsin Leathermen

Kris Studios



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On the Cover: The first edition of the Leatherman's Handbook, from the LA&M collections, and photograph of Larry Townsend, by and © JackFritscher.com.

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Spill a Drop for Lost Brothers....

THE LEGENDARY LARRY TOWNSEND

27 October 1930 - 29 July 2008

Author, *The Leatherman's Handbook*

by Jack Fritscher

www.DrummerArchives.com

LARRY TOWNSEND, author of the iconic 1972 *Leatherman's Handbook*, died at 2:40 PM, Tuesday, July 29 at Cedars Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. Born a Scorpio with Aries rising on October 27, 1930, he was 77 when overcome by complications from pneumonia. Writing for forty years under the pen name "Larry Townsend," he authored nearly one hundred novels including *Run Little Leather Boy* (1968), *The Faustus Contract* (1969), and the gay heritage landmark guide *The Leatherman's Handbook* (1972) at such erotic presses as Greenleaf Classics and the Other Traveler imprint of Olympia Press.

Dissatisfied with those straight publishers' corporate policies regarding royalties and copyrights, he broke free as an independent artist-writer in 1973 and founded LT Publications, the first dedicated gay leather book publisher in history.

Because Larry Townsend noted specifically in his *Leatherman's Handbook*, and throughout his life, that vanilla gay history has always suppressed leather history to keep it invisible, it is worth noting that for four years, Larry Townsend was the only specifically gay book publisher in America.

In the timeline of gay book publishing, Felice Picano did not found his SeaHorse Press in Manhattan until 1977, and Edmund White's Violet Quill authors did not meet until 1980.



Larry Townsend and Fred Yerkes, his domestic partner of 43 years (pictured in 1992). Behind every author, if that author is lucky, there is a lover-partner who is a producer who keeps the author up and running. Fred Yerkes, who was all that, died suddenly in July 2006. Larry survived him by two years. Privately, they were one of those legendary couples who cannot live one without the other.

Photograph by and © JackFritscher.com

Editor's Note: For more than thirty years, leather authors Jack Fritscher and Larry Townsend were longtime friends often collaborating on books such as the S&M anthology *Rainbow County and Other Stories* which won them the 1997 National Small Press Book Award for Erotica and was published by Townsend's LT Publications. Fritscher, often photographing Townsend in stills and video, is also the founding San Francisco editor of *Drummer* and the author of fifteen books including *Leather Blues* (1969); the epic *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir of San Francisco 1970-1982*, reviewed by *The Advocate* as "the gay *Gone with the Wind* of leather"; the nonfiction biography *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, and the leather-history "Silver Anniversary Introduction" to Larry Townsend's *Leatherman's Handbook*.



The novelist Larry Townsend was one of the most famous and beloved GLBT authors of the 20th-century. He founded the first dedicated gay book publishing house in America, LT Publications (1973), and began his scrupulously ethical mail-order business to ship books to every reader in every closet in every small town.

Photographs by and © JackFritscher.com

... he was a “leather identity” author intent on securing gender legitimacy for leathersmen un-closeting their virilized selves in a Stonewall culture of gay liberation ...

As author and publisher, Larry Townsend set his mission on marketing to fervent gay readers who lived in small US towns with no gay bookstore, and to Europeans eager for American leather literature. He was a mail-order retail genius. His books, distributed internationally, have been translated into many languages, and have sold more than a million copies.

PREPPIE BOY TO STAFF SERGEANT TO SEX TOURIST TO LEATHERMAN

Born in New York and growing up as a teenager of Swiss-German extraction in Los Angeles a few houses from Noel Coward and Irene Dunne, he ate cookies with his neighbor Laura Hope Crews who was Aunt Pittypat in *Gone with the Wind*. He attended the prestigious Peddie School, came out at the primeval LA leather bar “Cinema” on Santa Monica Boulevard, and was stationed as Staff Sergeant in charge of NCOIC Operations of Air Intelligence Squadrons for nearly five years with the US Air Force in Germany (1950-1954). During his European service, he day-tripped through Europe reading sadomasochistic literary classics in cafes and gathering post-war leather intelligence in cottages—all later reported in *The Leatherman’s Handbook*.

Completing his tour of duty, he entered into the 1950s underground of the LA leather scene where he and film star Montgomery Clift shared a lover. That romantic triad ended when Clift spirited the ham in their sandwich away to Cuba for the wild New Year’s Eve before Castro marched his revolution into Havana on January 8, 1959.

In the mid-1960s, he began photographing each of his dungeon partners for a scrapbook which he continued to fill for most of his life. With his degree in industrial psychology from UCLA (1957), he worked in the private sector and as a probation officer for juveniles with the Forestry Service. He was a lifelong animal lover famously favoring Doberman Pincher dogs, and Abyssinian cats who were the only creatures ever able to top him.

INTRODUCING THE LEATHER “ARCHETRIBE” TO ITSELF

Larry Townsend began his pioneering activism in the LA politics of gay liberation in the early 1960s. By popular culture or academic standards, *The Leatherman’s Handbook*, published when he was 42, is a rather extraordinary study written by an eyewitness participant. Even though his queries and conclusions were mostly based on the pre-Stonewall leather culture of leather males, leatherfolk of all genders (including female leatherboys and FTMs) have for years, according to a diversity of fan letters in his files and responses at live conferences, read, enjoyed, learned, and adapted to themselves the basic leather tropes and codes of

the leather lifestyle from his *Leatherman’s Handbook*. Only totally dumbed-down persons would fault *The Leatherman’s Handbook* for having a pure 1972 point of view and not a politically correct 2008 point of view. Its principles, as examined specifically in “The Prime of Mr. Larry Townsend,” the Introduction to the 25th Anniversary edition, are timeless. Larry Townsend, frankly, loathed anything politically correct.

Stylistically, he was one of the first leather authors to coin new portmanteau keywords tying leather and sex and men together to form the now standard vocabulary of leathersex and leathermen. He also dug deep to the rugged roots of Anglo-Saxon frankness to spell cum the nasty way so that it looks to the eye as onomatopoeic as it sounds.

Miffed at the queenstream’s relentless pop-culture disinformation about leathermen, including that which would become the editorial attitude of *The Advocate*, he stormed the barricades of the politically correct and leather-hating “sweater crowd” when he wrote this opening paragraph in his “Introduction” to *The Leatherman’s Handbook*:

“There have been many books printed over the last few years dealing with various aspects of homosexual behavior and lifestyle. In all of these the leatherman is constantly neglected—neglected or ridiculed by the fluff or the ‘straight’ reporter who wrote the book. In reading these previous efforts...I have been more than a little annoyed. So have many of my fellow leather people.”

As a teenager, three months older than James Dean, he was an upstart 1950s rebel with a cause, seduced by the charisma of Brando in *The Wild One* and by the totemic leather photography of Chuck Renslow and Etienne at Kris Studio. As a man and a psychologist in the 1960s and 1970s, he was a “leather identity” author intent on securing gender legitimacy for leathermen un-closeting their virilized selves in a Stonewall culture of gay liberation whose media image and sexual politics were dominated by effeminacy and drag.

When *Drummer* betrayed the masculine-identified trust of its readers with its absurd camp cover of *Drummer 9* (Halloween 1976), psychologist Larry Townsend was not surprised to learn of outraged men threatening to cancel their subscriptions because they judged “camp” to be taboo in *Drummer* where masculinity was totem. As a unit of measure of leathermen’s mindset in the 1970s, the words most repeated in the *Drummer* classifieds in which readers wrote personal ads identifying themselves, as well as what quality they were seeking in sex partners, were masculinity and masculine.

In 1972, as president of the “Homophile Effort for Legal Protection” which he helped found in 1969 to defend gays during and after entrapment arrests by the LAPD, he led a group in founding the H.E.L.P. Newsletter, the forebear of *Drummer* magazine founded in LA in 1975. Larry Townsend himself chose not to accept an invitation to be a co-founder of *Drummer* because, among other reasons in the cage-fighting that was the LA social scene, he did not want to be part of a magazine with a demanding deadline every thirty days.

THE EMPOWERMENT OF SELF-FASHIONING LEATHER IDENTITY: REPORTING A LIFESTYLE CREATES THE LIFESTYLE

Nevertheless, Larry Townsend’s influence shaped the psychology and the business plan of *Drummer*. According to the new leather-heritage book *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, Larry Townsend invented a synergistic formula of “marketing and identity” for 1970s men self-fashioning themselves as homomascu- line men in that first decade of gay lib when women were self-fashioning themselves in feminism. In principle, his *Leatherman’s Handbook* reported the leather lifestyle and thus generated more of that emerging leather lifestyle.

Absorbing Townsend’s synergy of book publishing into its magazine editorial policy, *Drummer* built its monthly issues and its circulation by reporting on the homomascu- line leather lifestyle it was creating, and thus empowering. For instance, leather history’s first cigar-fetish feature, “Cigar Blues,” and first cigar fiction, “Cigar Sarge,” in *Drummer* 22 (May 1978) caused the debut of cigars in leather bars five minutes after the issue hit the newstands.

Townsend’s pioneering *Leatherman’s Handbook* was the first important nonfiction analysis of leatherfolk in the twentieth century. It pairs perfectly with William Carney’s leather-identity novel *The Real Thing* (1968), a book which Townsend admired and cited specifically in his *Handbook*.

EYEWITNESS RASHOMON

As a writer and photographer and as a leather player, Larry Townsend was an eyewitness of evolving gay liberation in Los Angeles bars and bike clubs, including the political outfall of the infamous LAPD raid of the *Drummer* Charity “Slave Auction” at the Mark IV Bath on April 10, 1976, when forty-some leatherfolk were arrested and charged with breaking a Civil-War-era law forbidding “slavery.”

He himself was not arrested because he had spent the evening practicing “slavery” in his own photo-studio dungeon at his home in the hills on Sunset Plaza Drive above West Hollywood where many a bound-and-gagged slave experienced an S&M session feeling Larry’s greatest “hits” while his stereo speakers boomed out tapes of the ominous, fervent hammer blows of Mahler’s *Sixth* as well as his dark terminal *Ninth*.

Townsend, who could have written a *Rashomon* novel about the *Drummer* “Slave Auction,” documented his subjective version of that highly charged debacle between the besieged leather community and the fascistic LAPD Police Chief Ed Davis in his historical “Introduction” to the book *Gay San Francisco*.

LEATHER COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

For more than thirty years, whenever a leather organization or fund-raiser invited him to speak on a conference panel or to read from his work or to judge a leather contest, Larry Townsend rarely turned down any opportunity to help his hosts succeed. He was honored with many awards from the leather community, including a Forebear Award from the Pantheon of Leather.

In the 1990s, he spoke versions of his own personal oral history into the microphones of interviewers Jack Rinella for the Leather Archives & Museum and Bob Wingate for *Bound and Gagged Magazine*. His last public appearance was at Graylin Thornton’s “Mr. San Diego Leather Appreciation Dinner” in San Diego during March 2008.

He was as much a celebrity in London and Berlin and Manhattan and Chicago as he was in Los Angeles. In San Francisco, late in his life, even after the VCR and the Internet began making books an endangered species, he could pack a crowd into A Different Light Bookstore at 18th and Castro. In 1996, the audience loved seeing him make an entrance into that bookstore with a nearly naked young leather slave on one leash, and his Doberman dog on another. When both slave and dog “sat” at his stern command, he brought down the house.

DON’T FUCK WITH “THE TOWNSEND”

Writing in the *Bay Area Reporter*, venerable leather columnist Mister Marcus noted that the death of his peer was a loss to the “leather universe.” Larry Townsend was a huge personality who lived life large as a twentieth-century artist whose moods could have been charted by the National Weather Service, and whose roiling Rolodex of friends and frenemies might well be turned into a plot with arias like the operas he loved. At the Los Angeles Opera next season, a new young couple in formal clothes, not knowing whom they replace, will smile as they sit down taking their turn in a treasured pair of permanent seats surrendered only in death by the leather couple who through the years never missed an opening night.



For Larry Townsend the sky was the limit! At the dawn of Stonewall, he stretched the leather archetribes to grow its self-fashioning identity in his masterwork The Leatherman's Handbook. That signature guide remained perfect for leather life even after the Titanic 1970s crashed into the iceberg of HIV. New readers of all genders seem always to "get" it. His principles and insights remain timeless in the best way possible. His last writing about the leather sex and art of the Drummer salon was published four weeks before his passing in the leather-history book Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer Photograph by and © JackFritscher.com

*He himself was not arrested
because he had spent the evening
practicing "slavery" in his own
photo-studio dungeon ...*



Larry Townsend and “Mueller,” 1995, one of the several “Doberpersons” (Townsend’s term) with whom over many years he shared his West Hollywood home—as well as many a hike in Griffith Park. Townsend defined a person’s humanity in terms of kindness toward animals. He is survived by his Abyssinian cat Monique, perfectly adopted by Townsend’s own family. Photograph by and © JackFritscher.com

.....
*A suitable keening might be an hour
spent reading from one of his novels or
from The Leatherman’s Handbook.*
.....

In the way that Larry Townsend had dumped exploitative publishers like Greenleaf Classics and Other Traveler thirty-five years before to protect his earliest copyrights, he died pressing a wildly scandalous lawsuit—chronicled by *Publishers Weekly*—against many GLBT bookstores and a contemporary publisher he alleged had violated the intellectual property of his latest copyrights by reprinting his books without authorization, and without paying royalties.

In the last week of his conscious life, he made a *mea culpa* decision to remove most of the GLBT bookstores from his lawsuit because he realized the bookstores were not part of his alleged problem with the publisher. The lawsuit itself exhibits something of his character. Of all the gay civil rights he championed, his lifelong passion was to alert GLBT people not to be so masochistic that they sign over their copyrights to publishers in order to have their writing, drawings, photographs, and videos make it into print.

Aware of the importance of legal paperwork to gays and to the preservation of gay culture, Larry Townsend in 2007 wrote a codicil to his will designating that his manuscripts, correspondence, taped interviews, original photographs, and artwork be collected and archived at the John Hay Library at Brown University because it is a private institution that receives no public funds and so cannot be censored by the kind of lawmakers and politicians who censored the leathersex photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe in 1989.

THE DRUMMER SALON

Along with Robert Mapplethorpe, and Robert Opel who streaked the 1974 Oscars, Larry Townsend was a member of the sex, art, and salon around *Drummer*.

“I’m not a *Drummer* writer,” he wrote of himself, “I’m a novelist whose books were often excerpted in *Drummer*. In 1978, Jack Fritscher, the new editor of *Drummer*, took me to supper and began to convince me over pasta that the San Francisco *Drummer* of the late 1970s was a different *Drummer* than Los Angeles *Drummer*. After more months of Jack’s friendly persuasion, I came on board because so many of the fans of my books were also *Drummer* subscribers.”

Larry Townsend’s signature “Leather Notebook” column appeared in *Drummer* for twelve years from 1980 to 1992, and continued in *Honcho* to Spring 2008.

PAGING ANDREA BOCELLI AND SARAH BRIGHTMAN: “TIME TO SAY GOODBYE”

Larry Townsend’s last novel *TimeMasters* was published April 2008. His last writing was his “Introduction” to the book *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer* subtitled *A Memoir of the Sex, Art, and Salon of Drummer Magazine 1975-1999* (June 2008).

His domestic partner of forty-three years, Fred Yerkes, died July 8, 2006.

When gay marriage became legal in California on June 16, 2008, Larry Townsend said, “I’d like to have someone to marry. Fred and I would have been married. Thank God, though, for the domestic-partner law because it saved me so much trouble when Fred died.”

Four weeks later he was unconscious in Cedars Sinai ICU. Two weeks later, without regaining consciousness and surrounded by his family, he died, fifteen minutes after his Power of Attorney documents specified he be taken off life support.


At his own request, Larry Townsend was cremated with no funeral or memorial service. A suitable keening might be an hour spent reading from one of his novels or from *The Leatherman’s Handbook*.

He is survived by his sister, a nephew, and two nieces who were present for him in his life and who cared for him during his final illness.

LARRY TOWNSEND: WHAT’S NEXT?

Palm Drive Publishing, with whom Larry Townsend often collaborated, has announced a new book with the working title *The Larry Townsend Memorial Anthology* scheduled for publication in 2009. The “Call for Submissions” seeks essays, letters, interviews, reviews, and photographs. The book is open to everyone of every diversity. Details are posted at www.PalmDrivePublishing.com.

Further reading and research specifically about Larry Townsend and *The Leatherman’s Handbook*—all fact-checked and approved by Larry Townsend—can be found in *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*.

That book is available two ways: 1) for sale as a low-cost paperback, and 2) for free as a series of no-cost “free and green pdfs” accessible to all with a SEARCH feature at www.DrummerArchives.com. 



Purchase *Kris : The Physique Photography of Chuck Renslow* from the Leather Archives & Museum and receive a free DVD of "The Blue Rose". Digitized direct from the reel films, "The Blue Rose" was one of the most popular Kris films. This film is yours free when you purchase the book from The Leather Archives & Museum by visiting www.leatherarchives.org/krisbook/krisbook.htm or by calling 773.761.9200.

Kris: The Physique Photography of Chuck Renslow

Reviewed by Mauro Montoyo

Edited and introduced by Joseph W. Bean
with commentary by the artist

This book about Kris Studio and the resulting photographs, a collaboration between Joseph W. Bean and the photographer Chuck Renslow, offers a unique look at some early history of the gay and leather communities as they were evolving. Renslow is known to current generations as the owner of several bars in Chicago and the founder of International Mr. Leather, but the book offers glimpses of how his photography and early life shaped much of our leather community.

Joseph Bean, an icon in the community himself, wrote the introduction. He shares anecdotes, recollections and early documents to show a brief history of Kris Studio. At times, the writing seems like a conversation between two old friends, and it gives a comfortable and sometimes touching perspective of the early days not only of Kris Studio, but Renslow's relationships and past life. However, conversations often wander in directions that in person may make sense, but when written lack a cohesion. Bean does a nice job of gathering Renslow's recollections, but the presentation itself is somewhat muddled in places. It is often difficult to follow exactly what happened when as dates are thrown in almost randomly, the narrative jumps from one time to another and in some instances, the reader is left hanging with no further information on what could be a highly interesting topic on its own. He states the "founding of Kris Studio is definitely in 1950, 1952 and 1954" and then says some of the discrepancy is easily explained while some doesn't "budge." Yet the narrative following in the next several pages doesn't quite clarify this or give a definitive date for the founding. In another example, on page six, Bean discusses Renslow's graduation from high school without saying when, then throws in dates when Renslow had first one partner, then a second. We are left wondering exactly when all this took place. He casually mentions "Dick" without ever really saying who "Dick" is, then in the next paragraph, states that "Dick" moved away while Renslow continued to date "Bob".

Bean discusses the impact of Christine Jorgensen, the first well-known transsexual, on Kris Studios. Too much is made of this connection - the reader slogs through several paragraphs about Jorgensen, but ultimately is let down because there is no real connection here, except for a vague similarity in the name of "Kris" and "Christine". A couple of sentences would have sufficed.

Bean then lays out how the Studio came to be named "Kris", after a weapon used in Asia, with simply a nod to Jorgensen because her name was Christine. He states through Renslow's recollection that Dom Orejudos, Renslow's partner at the time, chose the name and it was registered in November, 1953. However, there is no proof through documentation to back up this statement. And in the next paragraph, he says it is the romantic version of what happened and negates it by proof of a model release signed by Orejudos much earlier, where the Studio is already identified as "Kris." It would have been much clearer had Bean stated that the 'romantic' version was simply Renslow's recollection of how the studio was named and then clarify it through the documentation that exists.

Towards the end of the Introduction, Bean discusses a second raid on Kris Studio, which resulted in Renslow losing his business licenses. Given that Renslow at the time ran several businesses, this would have benefitted from much further explanation because of the pioneering work Renslow was doing. But it was simply glossed over, leaving the reader to wonder how Renslow survived this period to go on to the status he now holds among us.

These examples, as well as some minor typographical errors, demonstrate that more editing and clarification would have provided a much clearer picture of the founding and early history of Kris Studios. It gives the introduction a rushed feeling, when this beautiful body of work deserves so much more and the history itself is of great interest to so many in our community.

Once through the Introduction, however, the true beauty of this book shines. After all, the majority of the book is dedicated to the actual artwork of Renslow (and to some degree, Orejudos, more famously known as Etienne). And artwork it is. The photographs are beautiful and transcend simple photography that some other early 'men's fitness' magazines produced. Here a complaint must be registered. The book format is structured so that after the Introduction and some photos of early documents, it is all photographs for nearly 150 pages. After the photos come the notes on the photographs. This is very distracting to have to flip back and forth between the photos and the notes at the back of the book. There are a few sections when the notes are included among

the photographs, and it makes a much smoother flow without having to flip back and forth. This could have easily been done throughout the book. But the notes themselves feel as if Renslow is having a one-on-one conversation about each photo with the reader - a very effective method of explanation.

That aside, one can dive in and enjoy the magnificence of these photos. The poses in the photographs, from earliest to latest, show how Renslow grew with his work. From single very simple photographs of nearly nude men to shots of two or more men together in suggestive poses demonstrate how the times dictated what was acceptable. The earlier photos made no pretension of what they were - photos of handsome, muscular males made to appeal to a particular audience. But they were 'clothed' for the times as men's 'fitness and physique' photos. As the laws changed, helped in part by Renslow's own court cases, nudity became allowable and Renslow followed suit through his artwork for publication. (It must be noted that even early on, he took many nude shots, not knowing if they could ever be displayed.) It is repeated throughout the introduction and the notes that Renslow preferred masculine, muscular men over the more boyish look, which became more popular as time went on. But Renslow stayed true to his own tastes and continued to use models from his gym and other sources.

It is amazingly difficult to pick just a few of these photos to describe here, and each photo is subject to the reader's tastes, but the following stood out as fine examples of Renslow's art.

Renslow worked with his models to bring out the best in each. He played with the lighting to capture a special mood throughout. On pages 48 and 49, two very different men in different poses show Renslow's leather leanings. On 48, a dark haired muscular man is shown full frontal wearing only a leather jacket (which was Etienne's) and boots. The lighting is from both sides and above him, leaving much of his body in semi-shadow, but actually lightly highlighting his abs, chest and tattoo on his chest and parts of his face. The wide stance, the grip of the hands on the bottom of the jacket and the highlighting of his penis while the rest of the groin area is shadowed is at once brilliant and sexy. He is staring directly at the camera as if issuing a challenge to the viewer. Renslow's notes say he was interested in the model's tattoos and didn't consider this man to have that terrific of a body so he used the shadowing and the leather jacket to bring out his best qualities. The photo is from November, 1958.

The second man, on page 49, is blonde, facing to the left and fully lit from that side. He is wearing boots and has his leather jacket slung over his left shoulder holding it with his left hand while in his right, he is holding a cigarette, clearly seen as sexy at that time. His gaze, unlike the direct in-your-face shot on the previous page, is off in the distance, as if seeking his next conquest. His expression is questing, yet clearly in charge and knowing what he wants. The lighting spotlights his

muscular body and large genitals with shadowing behind them which perfectly emphasizes his low-hanging penis. This is a very classic photo and brings to mind what James Dean might have looked like had he posed nude (at least publicly). Renslow's notes state that he doesn't remember too much about this model except that he was an incessant smoker and insisted on bringing his cigarette into the shoot (which actually turned out effectively). He was "one of the guys who showed up and just did it for the bread" as Renslow recalls. It was shot on August 8, 1959.

Both of the two photos, among many others, show Renslow's early fascination with leather and both of these models could walk into IML today without looking dated in the least.

Renslow also photographed several African-American men, one of whom went on to win Mr. Olympus in 1967, but was photographed by Renslow early in his career in 1960. To his credit, clearly Renslow didn't have any qualms about any sort of color barrier and shot some of the most handsome photos using his mastery of lighting. See pages 50 through 55.

Page 66 shows a very well built young man wears only an apron while putting a pot on a stove. It is at once a sweet and incredibly sexy shot, evoking a gay "Donna Reed" image while preserving the masculinity of the subject. The model is positioned so the apron hides his genitals and his arm mostly covers his ass. The kitchen background could have come straight out of "Leave It To Beaver" - the version most gay men would have loved. While no date is given, Renslow states that this model started shooting with him in 1957. Renslow's brief description says it is part of the "at-home series" - which makes one wonder if Renslow's own home life during this time period was as idyllic - it doesn't say whether that was Renslow's kitchen or not, but the nude man among the symmetry of the stove and cabinets along with the potholder and gingham curtains evoke the scent of chocolate chip cookies baking on a winter day. Whether it was or not, he captured the hominess and comfort of the kitchen with a wonderful image of a male nude, a man each of us would love to come home to.

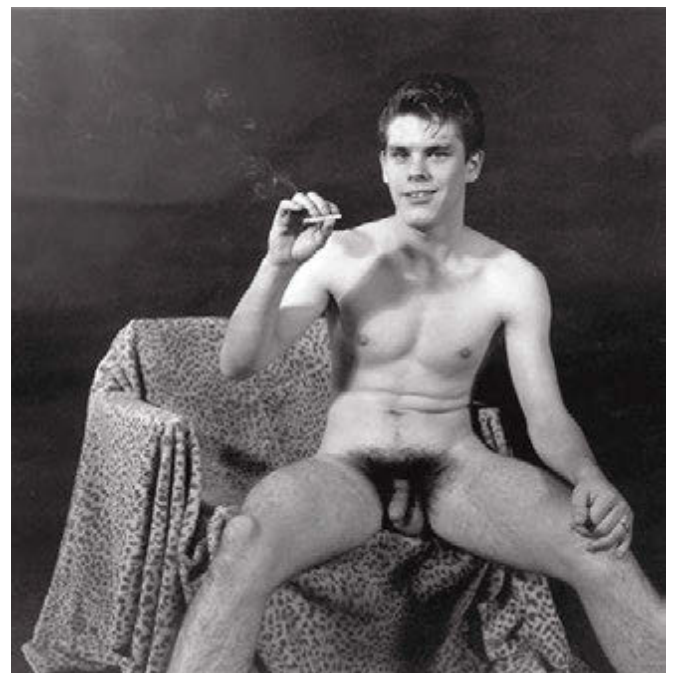
Another stunning image is found on page 73. These photos were long before the age of digital and Photo-Shop, so lighting was especially tricky to make work well. In this photo, dated May, 1962, a young muscular man is lying in bed, his lower body highlighted while his chest, shoulders and head are in shadow. Despite the shadow, he is clearly visible with a languid, 'I've been waiting for you' expression. Renslow showed his mastery of the lighting with this photo, exposing the genitals in a very sensuous way yet keeping a dark air of mystery to the man by shadowing his face. The contrasts are amazing. Renslow's notes on this subject say the man chose to pose naked, and wanted "all kinds of artistic things." It was taken in Renslow's bedroom with natural lighting, and Renslow said he did a lot of experimenting with the lighting. It was a very successful experiment as this photo is a masterpiece.



Top Row, left to right, Pages 50 and 66 · Bottom Row, left to right, Pages 73 and 103



left to right, Pages 39 and 102



On page 102, Renslow captured the youth and cockiness of the model, who, while staring straight at the camera, had a devil-may-care grin on his face, sitting nude in a chair with an animal print sheet over it and cigarette in hand. Renslow noted his hair pattern, which in this photo is brushed up and back with a few care-less strands falling over his forehead. The model was only 17 and this perfectly captures the youth of the time. Renslow had his older brother, also a model for him, sign the consent form.

Renslow also shot some duo photos. Page 39 brings the model from page 102, the 17 year old, laying across the lap of, and being spanked by, his older brother while his underwear are pulled down just below his ass, one leg on the floor and the other pulled up at a 90 degree angle. The boy being spanked is lighter-skinned and highlighted more than the seated older brother, who has a hairy chest. But the contrast serves very well to show off the best attributes of each. Their expressions tell all - the younger one anticipating a smack on his ass while the older one stares down at his brother, hand raised, ready to fall. For the viewer, without knowing they are brothers, it is a very sensual scene; upon reading the endnotes and finding they are siblings only adds to the sensuality in a 'forbidden' manner.

Another hot duo is found on page 103 where one model is on his knees gazing down at the other, who is lying on his back on a bed. The kneeling man is more lighted and is a sharp contrast to the black background, while the prone model's hair almost fades into it. Incongruously, yet strikingly, a lamp hangs in the upper right corner, capturing some of the highlights and adding a depth to the photo. It is at once intimate and daring, as if Renslow took the photo peeking through a couple's bedroom window. In fact, the photo was taken in Etienne's bedroom, and Renslow states that Etienne had a three-way with them and they were both hustlers in a hurry to get out of town.

It was quite a task just to single out several photos to highlight - a wealth of riches is included here and each and every photograph deserves its own attention. These were picked just to demonstrate Renslow's mastery of his craft; but any of the photos in the book could serve this capacity. They are all delights, sexy, sensuous and wonderful.

There is so much beauty and history in this collection that despite the disjointed Introduction, it is a book well worth owning and highly recommended. Should the authors decide on a second edition, a well-edited narrative and notes among the photos themselves rather than at the back of the book will provide a reader with both the wonder, beauty and mastery of the photographs and the historical context in which they were produced. These classic masterpieces deserve no less. **L**

Mauro Montoya, a resident of Albuquerque and Fort Lauderdale, is the President of Lavender Writes, a gay and lesbian writers' organization in Fort Lauderdale. He has his own photo studio, PhotoMauro Photography, and is also a free-lance writer as well as a recovering attorney. Montoya was Mr. MidAtlantic Leather 1996, and held several other titles from Puerto Rico to Florida. He served on the board of Leather University, and founded the Leather Curious group at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center in Fort Lauderdale. He produced Mr. Florida Leather from 2001-2004 and is currently coordinating the Rio Grande Leather Contest in October, 2008, in Albuquerque.



W Land of Kings and Castaways: Wisconsin's Leathermen's Past

by Rob Ridinger

The beginnings of the complex and colorful history of Wisconsin's leathermen community occurred in Milwaukee, in January, 1973. Roger Deeley founded Silver Star MC, which chose the Wreck Room—the city's first leather/levi bar, opened by Wayne Bernhagen in 1972—as their home bar. The Wreck Room would serve as home to many leathermen over the ensuing decades, until its closing in the early 1990s.

In the spring of 1973, the club became one of the founders of the Mid America Conference of Clubs (MACC). The club sent representatives to the gathering of delegates in Chicago on April 28, during the Second City's 2 Becomes 8 run. Their distinctive bright red and silver diamond colors foreshadowed the colorful heraldry created by successor clubs over the next four decades.

They also addressed the need for a local gay publication by issuing the first issue of G Milwaukee in November, 1975. Articles included "How To Make It With A Leather Man," a letter from a new Silver Star pledge, and a notice for the club's second annual Christmas Toy Drive.

The first four runs held by Silver Star were held at the Plankinton Hotel in Milwaukee, and their approach to leather can be seen in the title they gave their 1980 run: Progress Through Brotherhood.

Silver Star's contributions to the Midwest scene were recognized at the MACC meeting held in New Orleans on October 9, 1976. Roger Deeley was elected as the treasurer at the conference.





The next club to appear on the state scene was one which would become a fixture in the Midwest leather world: the Argonauts. Formed in 1974 by fission from Silver Star, and taking their name from the heroes who quested with Jason for the Golden Fleece, their distinctive insignia was a white oblong edged in black, with a male head facing left wearing a Greek helmet. The word Argonauts flowed in red where the plume would be.

By 1991, the Argonauts had relocated their base of operations from Milwaukee to Green Bay, making them MACC's most northern members.

The Argonauts rejoined the Mid America Conference on March 20, 1999, during the Conductors run in Nashville, Tennessee.

Originally, their annual event was Winter Quest, first held January 24-26, 1975; it later shifted to become an annual dinner. The main event moved to the summer and was renamed North Woods. To mark the shift, between 1984 and 1993 the North Woods runs had ".5" added to their numbers. They also engaged in joint summer runs with the Castaways at a farm in Blue Earth County, where the MACC 2004 fall meeting was held on August 21.

In addition, The Argonauts was the club from which one of Minnesota's enduring clubs was formed: the Black Guard.

Milwaukee's long heritage as a brewing center was combined with the state animal of Wisconsin in 1984, when the Beer Town Badgers came into

being. Their logo was a yellow outline of the state of Wisconsin, on a circular blue field with two men standing at the bottom, Milwaukee beneath them.

Their foamy theme was carried out in the name of their annual September run, initiated in 1985, entitled Beer Stein. Several of the Badgers died of AIDS in the early 1990s, and due to internal pressures, the club officially dropped the name Beer Town Badgers and reincorporated as the Barons in 1993/94, before quietly dissolving.

Backpatches depicting a brown teddy bear wearing a leather cap, harness, chaps, and boots on an oval yellow field first began to be seen in the autumn of 1979, when Bob Pfeiffer, Tom R., and Marshall H. formed the Castaways, known across the Midwest as The Teddy Bear Club. Headquartered at the Wreck Room, by the late 1990's the Castaways were sponsoring joint runs with the Argonauts. Run names reflected both leather (Boot Camp 2002) and a healthy sense of humor (the 25th anniversary of the Castaways, named Laugh-In).

A Wisconsin leatherman was among the initial pool of contestants appearing in Chicago for the very first International Mr. Leather competition in 1979: the Wreck Room sponsoring Jim Kazlik.

The next candidate from over the border did not appear in Chicago until 1982, when D. Slowik was sent by Milwaukee's Club 219. The following year, Club 219 sent Rory H. to Chicago, accompanied by Lash F. from Rod's in Madison (the first time that city



had been represented). In 1984 Ron D. from Club 219 qualified as a semifinalist.

Two years after the bar's opening in 1986, the first Mr. Boot Camp Saloon, Lee Scherz (who would become one of the founding members of the Oberons), began a tradition of the holders of this title competing at IML, carried on by his successor Dan Chunn the next year.

The process of growth by amicable fission was repeated in 1987, when the Castaways witnessed the birth of what would become one of the more unique clubs in the region, the Oberons, by founders Tom R., Luther C., Mark V., Rollie D., Bill J. and Lee Scherz.

Their distinctive insignia was an isosceles triangle with the long axis facing down, edged with a deep border of bright green, containing a green maple leaf edged in gold and the word Oberons written across the top of the triangle. The maple leaf was a reference to the forest kingdom of Oberon, lord of the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Their newsletter, born as *The Tattletale*, swiftly amended its name to become *The Royal Herald*.

The annual runs held in Milwaukee borrowed their theme from the club colors and were given the name Acorn, with themes related to regional history (such as Acorn VI, "On The Shores Of Lake Oberon, A Fairy Home Companion" (June 18-20, 1993)—a clear parody of Garrison Keillor's popular radio show).

The Shakespearean flavor of the club is most visible in the run book for Acorn III in 1990, which quotes in full a speech of the forest king Oberon, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, bidding all attendees "Now, until the break of day, Through this house each fairy stray...."

Most of the in-town runs were held in the old Hotel Wisconsin, until it was remodeled. The Oberons became citizens of the Mid America Conference at the 1995 spring meeting in Kansas City. That same year also saw the birth, on March 1, of another club for Milwaukee, the Firebirds. This club was admitted to MACC at the same meeting as the Oberons. They were unable to sustain themselves and faded away after a few years, although they did hold joint club nights with the Oberons until 1998.

Rod's in Madison returned to the IML stage in 1988 in the person of Carl Cliver, Mr. Gay Madison '88-'89.

1990 saw the return of the Boot Camp, represented by Tony T.; in 1991, in addition to John L. from Madison, Mark D., the first IML contestant to be sponsored by the Argonauts, made his appearance. Tony would go on to compete for the Wreck Room in 1992, as part of a four-man Wisconsin field (the largest contingent the state had yet sent to Chicago). He was accompanied by David M., Mr. Boot Camp '92, and two candidates from the capital, John Wood and Bret S.



The first Mr. Wisconsin Drummer contest was held on February 29, 1992 at the Wreck Room in Milwaukee.

1993 saw Wood (who reached the semi-finals) and Tony T. returning to the IML stage, as Mr. Leather Madison and Mr. Midwest Leather, the latter contest held in Milwaukee.

In 1994, the first man to bear the title of Mr. Wisconsin Leather, Paul W. of Madison, became the third IML semifinalist from the state; in 1995 Rods sent Alvin Robinson as Mr. Madison Leather and Milwaukee sent Robert Davolt, Mr. Wisconsin L/L Daddy '94-95.

The Boy Scout heritage of the Midwest was given a decided tweak in the years 1996 through 1998 by the controversial figure of Queerscout, who appeared as Mr. Wisconsin Leather for 1995 and Mr. Wisconsin Fantasy for two years.

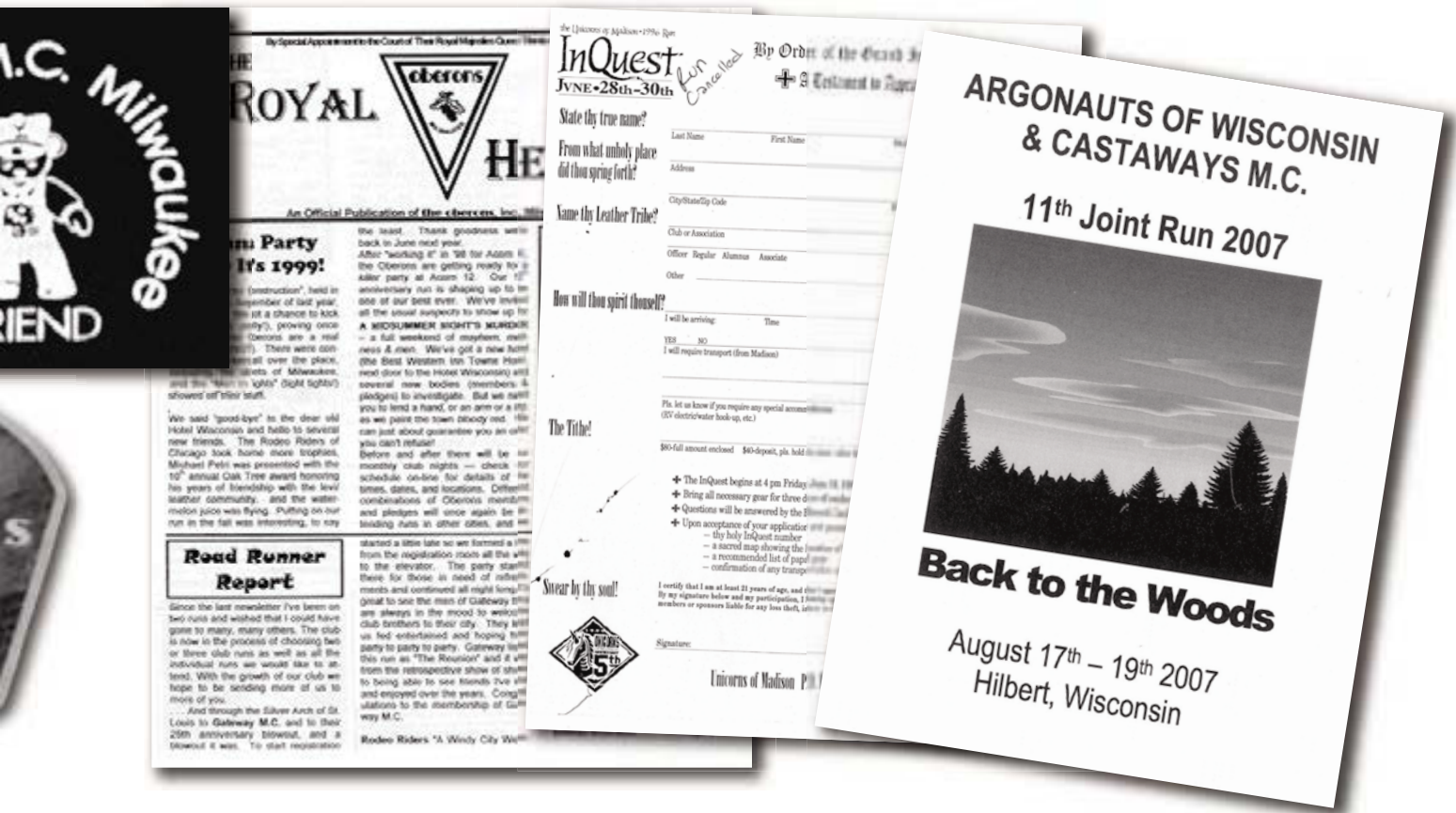
He was joined in 1996 by that year's Mr. Rod's, Stacy D. of Menasha. 1997 brought Colin Priestersbach (Mr. Northwoods '96-'97, the first contestant from the Argonauts since 1991), and Stacy DeSotel of Green Bay (Mr. Wisconsin L/L Daddy), while 1998 had Priestersbach's successor as Mr. Northwoods, Michael M.

After a one-year absence, Tim C. (Mr. Wisconsin Leatherman 2000), and Ric Sullivan (Mr. Northwoods 1999), returned a badger presence to IML. Mr. Northwoods 2000, T. J. Herman, was the sole Wisconsin titleholder at IML in 2001.

2002 saw a new Wisconsin title appearing on the IML stage in the person of Stephen Seefeldt, Mr. Harbor Room, a Milwaukee bar which had opened in 2000. He was followed in 2003 by Andy Schaidler, (Mr. Northwoods 2002), and in 2004 by Ross Katzman (Mr. Harbor Room 2003) and John Weiler (Mr. Northwoods 2003/04).

The state capital of Madison also participated in the leather club life of Wisconsin, although to a lesser degree than the longer established centers of Milwaukee and Green Bay. While discussions about the formation of a leather club for the city had been ongoing for some time, it was not until June 1991 that the Unicorns of Madison were brought into being.

To avoid conflicting with established runs being hosted by the Mid America Conference, the Unicorns placed their events as close to the July 4 weekend as possible, beginning with Liberty Quest (July 1-3, 1994). Its successor, West Quest, was held June 30-July 2 1995, at a rural campsite in southwest



Wisconsin near Prairie du Chien. The run pin was shaped like a marshal's silver star.


Club functions were usually held at Rod's or The Shamrock. Following the destruction by fire of Rod's in early 1996, fund raisers were held by the Castaways and Trident Windy City, to assist in replacing lost revenues and keep the 1996 run on schedule. It was named Inquest; scheduled for June 28-30 1996, the Unicorns were ultimately unable to recover sufficiently to hold it.

The Unicorns contributed one of their founding members to the national leather scene; he would go on to become the most famous son of the Wisconsin community.

In 1996, Robert Davolt (Mr. Wisconsin Leather/Levi Daddy 1994-1995 and an IML competitor in 1995), moved to San Francisco to become publisher and editor of Drummer. In his adopted city he was awarded the title San Francisco Leather Daddy XIX and quickly established himself as one of the most widely read writers and columnists serving the leather community. His work was marked by insight and humor. He also served as chair of the San Francisco Leather Pride contingent in the city's annual gay pride celebration.

In 2003, a collection of his columns appeared in print from Daedalus Press under the title *Painfully Obvious : An Irreverent and Unauthorized Manual for Leather/SM*. His observations on and concern for the future of the leather community led him to serve as a member of the Board of Directors of the Leather Archives for several years.

In his inimitable fashion, he wrote his own obituary. "My Last Column was distributed via the Internet on May 9, 2005, just six days before his death on May 15. It ended with: "I could consider no greater passion than to write; I could ask for no better place than among leathermen. To have been one of you."

With these words, he shared the heritage of honor, service and joy in leather he had brought to the national stage with him, out of the land between the great river and the great lakes. He left a legacy for those future leatherfolk of Wisconsin to recall with pride and carry on. 



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