

## Presentation of Honors

The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers is pleased to honor in this issue of the *Proceedings* three outstanding geographers who join Preston James as recipients of the CLAG Award for Outstanding contributions in Teaching, Research, and Service: **James J. Parsons, Robert C. West, and Robert L. Carmin.**



### James J. Parsons

We, the members of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers, honor James J. Parson (Jim), who is the most eclectic, consistently productive, renowned, currently active historical geographer with Latin American specialization.

Since Parsons' post-World War II graduate days at Cal he has spent almost a fifth of his life in Latin America. This research (and the efforts of associated graduate students) produced a tremendous volume of geographical publications and large number of graduate students. The critical feature of this is that Jim has been able to return to his *patria chica*, Antioquia, many, many times in the last 30 years. This repeated restudying of known places provides the deep insights into Latin culture for which he is famous. These insights obtained by an outsider were possible through his close observations and long enduring friendships that developed over the three decades. They have allowed him to see the significance of important changes in the landscape in Central and South America ahead of most others.

Parsons has several marvelous assets. He possesses the intellect to fully appreciate the environmental scenes through which he passes. As a journalist he developed effective writing skills early. While a student Jim learned Spanish, French, and German, and has continued to use these tools at the magnificent libraries of the University of California at Berkeley.

His Bachelor of Arts in Economics and his Master of Arts and doctorate in Geography resulted in a hybridization. Jim has maintained economic imperatives and has added those of history as guides in his geographical research. During his career he has had some of the most insightful colleagues in the world with whom to trade ideas. He has respected and fostered the curiosity of his students and fellow staff members and has gained much from them. The Department of

Geography under Carl O. Sauer and James J. Parsons also had a nearly ideal working relationship with the Office of Naval Research that maximized research time in the field and minimized governmental influence. This multiple and continual foreign experience of Jim's has demonstrated the efficacy of the transcultural training of the geographer. Coupling these features of his working life with his unassuming, happy, friendly, helpful, and intensely inquisitive personality brings Jim Parsons to be honored by CLAG in 1978 as the pre-eminent Latin American research scholar and philosopher of our time. Many other organizations have honored him, such as the Guggenheim Foundation, the University of Antioquia, and the California Geographers, and he has been president of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers and president of the Association of American Geographers as well.

Many themes have developed from his quality pen. As a historical-cultural geographer he has placed the features of human activity in their local, regional, and temporal perspective. Whether he is discussing economic, cultural, or biologic topics we gain insights into the processes of change and development. Early studies on economic topics involving crops such as hops in California and coffee in New Caledonia or manufacturing and real estate developments seem to have been expanded upon to include the totality of cultural history in his books on Antioqueño colonization and expansion in western Colombia. His writings on cotton, cattle, gold mining, vegetation, soils, and savannas in Central America and cork oaks, starlings, tourism, and sand bed agriculture in Spain demonstrate that Parsons has mastery over a broad spectrum of topics.

In the last decade or two Jim's published contributions have turned more to biogeographical features and human modification of them. Turtles, discussed and written about in articles and book form, obviously enthused him and we know much more of their history and ecology as a result. The spread of African grasses and their influence on the livestock industry in Latin America have been studied and he will probably continue this work. These grasses have been an integral part of his fascination with the ecological problems of rain forests and savannas, which he has seen develop with increasing intensity in Latin America, and he has urged us to join him in this study of biogeography.

Research in pre-Columbian archeological ridged fields fascinated Jim and the students working with him; suddenly the world was offered reports on new evidence of the power of Amerinds' agricultural efforts. The ability of human

activity to change the forest landscape to cropland or grassland has stirred Jim to action repeatedly, on the Mosquitia, in lowland Colombia, in Central America, in Amazonia, and in the Paraná country.

We all became better acquainted with the western Caribbean islands "where English is spoken" and why it is spoken as a result of Jim's investigations in San Andrés and adjacent coasts.

Parsons has had the gift of helping his students to discover for themselves the processes of modifying the landscape. In addition, he always has brought to his geography courses and field activities a certain serendipitous bent that has given many of his students the courage to follow opening pathways wherever they lead. Being with Jim in the field meant that we had goals, but they were to be interlaced with all else one could observe in passing. The most powerful example he has given us is that we can leave the simple confines of our offices (and the world cities) and go into the countryside of other cultures with great benefit.

This philosophy of continual field observation, extensive literature search, and captivating descriptions of landscapes and their human modification and the publication of some are admonitions given to us all by Alexander von Humboldt and Carl O. Sauer. We thank James J. Parsons for reemphasizing these imperatives to geographic studies, and present him the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers Award for Outstanding Contributions in Teaching, Research, and Service in the Geography of Latin America.

Carl L. Johannessen  
Chair, Honors Committee 1978



**Robert C. West**

Our choice for the 1980 Honors Award for Outstanding Contributions in Teaching, Research, and Service is a Latin Americanist of many talents and abilities. Above all, however, we have selected an individual whose lifetime of work has set an example of how scholarship in Latin America should be conducted and how its findings might be conveyed for the enlightenment of the more general audience found in our classrooms. For more

than 40 years, his inquiring mind has ranged across the continent from Mexico and Central America to South America. His methodology has demonstrated the true strengths of a geographer, a fine blend of archival research rooted in a firm base of field analysis. His travels to the field indeed have been so numerous that barely a year has passed without his crossing the border southwards. And on so many of these trips, students have accompanied him, for he has not been content merely to contribute to the research knowledge of Latin America, but has constantly sought to spread that knowledge and insight to others. For some, this sharing has occurred most successfully in what many regard as the finest modern regional geography text book available for any part of the world, *Middle America: Its Lands and Peoples*. It must be obvious by now that I am referring to Bob West.

To state the formal litany of Bob's academic life to date is to repeat a history that is already thoroughly known to most of you, and that has been most eloquently described by Bill Davidson and Jim Parsons in *GeoScience and Man*, Volume 21, just published. I would add only one observation. Influential though Bob's original scholarship has been on the interrelationships of indigenous and colonial societies as they evolved in the particular landscapes of Latin America, and important though his efforts have been to convey his insights to a wider student population, I remain most impressed by the quietly supportive role he has played for so many other members of the Latin American community of scholars. A glance at this list of publications shows a continuous flow of reviews and major tasks of editing proceedings and handbooks such as the Handbook of Middle American Indians. There is little glamor involved in these tasks, which require selfless sharing of one's knowledge with others. Yet how many of us, perhaps unknowingly, have benefitted from this aspect of Bob's work?

Bob West has received a number of previous prestigious awards for his lifetime of scholarship. We hope that this present recognition will be particularly meaningful, coming as it does from his colleagues who share most closely the interests and area of the world that has engaged his attention. The Honors Committee is delighted indeed to announce the 1980 CLAG Award for Outstanding Teaching, Research, and Service to Robert Cooper West.



**Robert L. Carmin**

The Honors Committee decided that in addition to the selection of the recipient of the 1980 Honors Award, it was an

appropriate moment to vote a special commendation to an individual who, for the last ten years, has been a supporter and, through his good offices, a benefactor of CLAG. Our organization could not have survived to be the vibrant and successful group it is without the very considerable and sustained encouragement we have received from Ball State University. The establishment of CLAG with its first meeting at Muncie in 1970 required the belief that there was both a demand and support for such an organization before evidence was available for that view. Our recipient had the foresight and, because of his position, the ability to stake his institution's resources on our behalf, and he has continued to do so to the present. Until recently, we as individuals put in a mere three dollars each, for which we received a steady stream of newsletters, communications, and the organization of annual meetings. But others contributed the time, energy, and additional needed resources. For ten years of steadfast support, help, and nurturing to develop CLAG to be the viable and active organization it is today, the Honors Committee enthusiastically endorses the award of a special commendation to Robert L. Carmin.

Peter W. Rees  
Chair, Honors Committee  
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