

AAG Newsletter
of the
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Geographers

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Archiving and Accessing Geography's History

Histories of geography abound, and depending on the era and one's perspective, they range from the sacred to the blasphemous. Accounts of our history have been seen variously as carefully researched or cleverly construed; inclusive or exclusive; top-down or bottom up; serious or irrelevant; magnanimous or self-serving; penetratingly insightful or just plain nasty; too provincially American or too provincially British; the efforts of gatekeepers at their worst or of the barbarians at their best; and in many other ways.

Whatever your analysis of the history of our discipline, there is probably one thing we can all agree on, and that is the need to collect, preserve, and make accessible to all the historical documentation of our discipline.

That is why I am so pleased to announce that during this year's AAG Annual Meeting in Boston, three distinguished members of our Association will be honored and celebrated for their exceptional life-long efforts to record, archive, and pass on to future generations important components of the history of American geography. The sustained archival contributions of Maynard Weston Dow and Nancy Freeman Dow, creators of the "Geographers on Film" series, and of long-time AAG Archivist Geoffrey J. Martin, will be the focus of numerous featured sessions in Boston, as well as of awards and special citations of appreciation from the AAG Council and the AAG History of Geography Specialty Group. All three will receive the "American Geographical History Award," authorized by the AAG Council and awarded by the AAG Archives and Association History Committee.

AAG and the Geographers on Film Collection

I am also pleased to announce that the AAG will now play a central role in managing, archiving, digitizing, and – most importantly – disseminating one of the recently "hidden" treasures of our discipline's history,

the "Geographers on Film" collection, created by Wes and Nancy Dow over the past forty years. Comprising over 300 filmed interviews, the project provides insight into the thought, opinions, circumstances, and lives of many of our discipline's leading scholars and researchers, and is a valuable resource for teaching, scholarship and research within our discipline and beyond it.

The format of the series, plus its depth and time span, makes "Geographers on Film" one of the richest disciplinary archival oral history resources in the academy.

Most interviews of geographers gathered by Wes and Nancy Dow, now known collectively as the "Geographers on Film" (GoF) series, had been bequeathed to Michigan State University's Vincent Voice Library, where they had been stored for several years, awaiting digitization and public distribution. However, unexpected funding and staffing constraints had created uncertainty about when or if the collection would be digitized, and how it would be made available for broad distribution. Finally, after many constructive discussions over a year's time among the librarians at MSU, Wes Dow, Fritz Nelson, and myself, discussions meant to determine how best to "free the films," it was decided to move the tapes from MSU to the AAG's main offices in Washington DC, where the AAG will undertake the

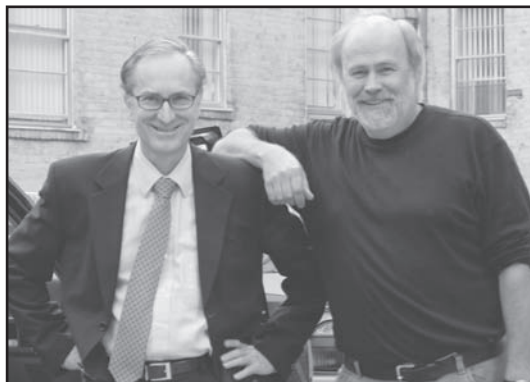


Richardson

Continued on page 6

digitization and active distribution of the collection in several formats.

Wes formalized the mutual agreement among all parties in a letter stating that, "As a result of conversations with Fritz Nelson and Doug Richardson of the AAG and the opportunity for GOF to garner more exposure may I suggest we terminate the relationship between GOF and MSU. To wit I would like to nullify our agreement of 2002...in order to set in motion the opportunity for the AAG to provide the umbrella and resources to afford more extensive circulation of the series." (Letter of 6-13-07 from Wes Dow to MSU Library).



Doug Richardson with Fritz Nelson (right), who stopped by the AAG to deliver the *Geographers on Film* series.

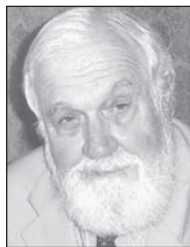
Shortly thereafter the tapes arrived safely at the AAG (in the back of Fritz Nelson's pick-up truck; thank you, Fritz!), and are now almost completely inventoried. We have begun the process of digitizing some of the films and video tapes, and have a

pilot project underway to distribute some of these via the Internet, as well as on DVD. The AAG has also formed a GoF advisory committee, comprised of Wes Dow, Kent Mathewson, Chris Baruth, Alec Murphy, Rachel Franklin, Fritz Nelson, and myself, to assist in moving the project forward and to ensure that these rich historical resources receive the attention they deserve. As the films and tapes are digitized, copies will be archived at several major libraries, including at Michigan State University and at the AAG Archives at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, to ensure their preservation.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment and leadership of Frederick "Fritz" Nelson, Chair of the AAG Archives and Association History Committee, with whom I have worked closely on the GoF and Archival matters, and whose leadership of the Committee has been extraordinary. Thanks again, Fritz.

Special Sessions in Boston

Several special sessions devoted to "Geographers on Film" and to Geoffrey Martin's archival research and writing contributions to Association and disciplinary history have been organized for the AAG's Boston meeting. The sessions feature numerous excerpts from the GoF collec-



Wes Dow



Nancy Dow



Martin

tion and will include discussion of Martin's wide-ranging archival research program and the voluminous and original archival materials he has compiled and organized over many years as the AAG Archivist.

Wes Dow has personally selected the GoF films and videos to be featured in several of these special sessions. One of the sessions will focus on the history of geography at Harvard, acknowledging our meeting's location this year in Boston. Geoffrey Martin has written extensively about W.M. Davis's associates and students at Harvard (e.g., Huntington, Bowman, and Jefferson). GoF also has several revealing film clips dealing with various aspects of this history.

The special sessions honoring the Dows and Martin are summarized immediately following this column (on page 7, at right). Many of these sessions will be videotaped, providing a fitting capstone to the GoF series, and to the careers of both Dow and Martin. ■

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