

Jim O'Donnell – A Remembrance

We celebrate the life and contributions of Jim O'Donnell, who passed away on February 20, 2012. Jim was a member of the Geoscience Information Society for over 30 years. He ran for President once, but was relieved when he lost because he had agreed to run for the President of the ALA Map and Geography Roundtable at the same time. He would have made an excellent leader of either group. Instead he served GIS/GSIS in many different ways.

At the Annual Business Meeting, he was our parliamentarian and sage – the voice of clarity and reason. In the mid-1980s, Jim had worked with a group to update the bylaws. He was our expert on procedure and provided advice to the Executive Board on what was possible with or without a vote. He posed pointed questions at the meetings and made thoughtful comments that propelled the discussion forward. Jim proposed the Society's current logo, which was designed by a friend.

New attendees at the Annual Meeting were often truly welcomed into the Society by Jim. He was very affirming and supportive. Jim made new members feel comfortable to speak up and contribute at meeting sessions.

He was a co-founder and early President of the Pacific Section. There was concern that members of the Section would spend more time on the Section's projects than the work of the main Society. It turned out that after two years, the main activity was a lunch at the Annual Meeting. This eventually evolved in a relaxed social occasion where members from any region could meet and learn from each other.

Jim had a strong interest in GeoRef. He served on the American Geosciences Institute's GeoRef Advisory Committee for several years.

Jim had a strong commitment to resource sharing. He set up an informal agreement to fax papers between the UCLA and Caltech geosciences libraries. At the 1992 meeting, he and other California librarians over dinner at the Rookwood Restaurant formed the Rookwood Accord to share materials between our libraries. They added other institutions to the group with the Lake Merced amendments at the WAML meeting at San Francisco State University. Less formally, Jim could always be counted on to respond to frantic, late Friday afternoon pleas on Geonet from East Coast librarians, desperate for ILLs after the usual lenders had closed for the weekend.

In both GIS/GSIS and the Western Association of Map Libraries, Jim was involved in publications production and distribution. He made many helpful changes as Publications Manager. He was involved in the publication of the Proceedings and the physical awards. Jim suggested changes in the stock of publications and ways to streamline distribution. All this work helped when he became GSIS Secretary for 2003 and 2004.

Jim was our Webmaster (1999-2007) and the Chair of the Society's Website Advisory Committee from 1998 to 2004. He helped choose and presented the Best Website Award. Jim also served on the Mary B. Ansari Best Reference Work Committee (2002-2004).

Jim's papers at GSA/GSIS Annual Meetings focused on hot topics, electronic information, faculty behavior, copyright, and GeoRef use. He and Charlotte Derksen presented a paper on CD-ROM and floppy-disk databases at the 1989 meeting and one on evaluating net resources in 1995. In 1999, he presented a talk on copyright for geoscientists. In 2001, Jim presented an analysis of faculty citation behavior to see how much of the work that they cited was available online. In his copyright talk, he put up a slide that just had the word "duh" to make a point. The point was made.

Though Caltech's map collection is not very large, Jim had an active interest in map librarianship. He served on the Cartographic Users Advisory Council from 1993 to 1995. He was an active member of the Western Association of Map Libraries and hosted some memorable meetings at Caltech.

Once at a WAML meeting in San Diego, he looked around and commented that we were mostly ex-hippies. He drove to a lot of the WAML meetings in the West, and the journeys with him were memorable, particularly a stop at a curious café in Panguitch, Utah that had cow salt shakers. On the

way back from a Thai restaurant on Oahu at the WAML 1992 meeting, the group started singing old classics. It was an opportunity to hear Jim's wonderful voice, which kept the tunes going.

Attending professional meetings with Jim was always a culinary treat. He would identify interesting local restaurants. Three cities come to mind. At the 1986 San Antonio meeting, he took a small group to two Mexican restaurants that he had known when he worked at Trinity University. He liked Rosario's a lot and held a special fondness for La Fogata. At the meeting, his description of the dinner at Rosario's was so good that he took two groups there.

At the 1995 New Orleans meeting, Jim was good company at meals at the Gumbo Shop, Mulate's Cajun restaurant, Galatoire's, Antoine's, Emeril's New Orleans, and even the Waffle House. The whole conference felt like a tasting.

Jim fell and injured his arm at the 1993 ALA Annual Meeting in New Orleans. He went to two hospitals, got a cast, and then attended meetings as usual. Jim was tough.

At GeoInfo IV, our best culinary experience was a nondescript Canadian-Middle Eastern restaurant near the downtown mall. The menu had a chef's platter. Jim, Rich Spohn, and Michael Noga agreed to try it. The owner was so pleased they had ordered the platter that they kept receiving a supply of flavorful Middle Eastern dishes.

Several times the GSA Annual Meeting was held in Denver. One of the most memorable was the 2007 meeting. Neither Jim nor Michael Noga could check in to the Adams Mark Hotel until late Saturday afternoon. They were told that the room had been taken, probably by Boston Red Sox fans who paid more to see the World Series. Instead they were given the Executive Suite at a very good price. There were no beds, but a large kitchen for entertaining and a nice big meeting table. Jim thought it was so funny that he invited other GSIS members to tour the room.

Jim's last contribution to geoscience librarianship was his service on the Geological Society of America Publications Committee. He really enjoyed being on the Committee and working with its members. We missed Jim's presence at the Minneapolis meeting. We miss Jim for his intelligence, his wit, his steady service to our Society and the profession, and most of all for being a life spirit at every GIS/GSIS meeting we had the fortune of attending with him.

Michael M. Noga with contributions from friends and colleagues

(Submitted to the GSIS (Geoscience Information Society) Newsletter – March 14, 2012)
