



by Phil White
2014 WAML Scholarship Recipient

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In the fall of 2013, I met with a former map librarian, Beth Filar Williams, previously of the University of Colorado at Boulder, to discuss a career in map and GIS librarianship. I was a few weeks into the first semester of my MLIS at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Beth was the Director of the Digital Media Commons in Jackson Library on campus. As a map enthusiast with a master's degree in Geography, I was interested in making the most of my academic background and my new career in librarianship. The first thing Beth told me about was the Western Association of Map Libraries, and that I should go to a WAML meeting as soon as possible. She told me that I would have a fun time, learn about the field, and meet a lot of great people there. Beth was right.

I was very fortunate to receive the first ever scholarship to attend a WAML conference, the 2014 meeting in Los Angeles. I came to the conference from far-off North Carolina, and, being the only student in attendance, I was not quite sure how the meeting would unfold. When I arrived on the opening morning of the meeting, Jon Jablonski was the first person I spoke to, and he immediately put me at ease when he said, "Don't be bashful, we're a friendly bunch." I did my best to meet and get to know as many WAML-ites as I could, and everyone extended a warm welcome to me.

The variety of topics presented at the conference provided a nice mix of learning opportunities and highly enjoyable, "feel-good" stories. As someone just entering the profession, I appreciated the technical topics delivered by Susan Powell, Kim Durante, and Daniel Brendle-Moczuk. The techniques they demonstrated were subjects I have only just started to explore. These presentations, and others, gave me a lot of insight into areas where I can look to enhance my own skillset. A nice feature in the presentation line-up was that technically oriented presentations were



typically followed by broader and more light-hearted fare. Hearing Glen Creason's experience of managing the John Feathers map collection was impressive, and it was a truly engaging narrative. I also enjoyed learning about the organizational processes involved with managing the massive aerial photograph collections at UCSB and UCLA. The Fairchild Collections made for interesting viewing and gave me a glance into Southern California nostalgia. These presentations were highlights of the conference.

WAML members were quick to share career and job search advice. Nearly everyone I spoke with had wise words to impart, and I felt that a few even took me under their wing a little. Within the first few hours of the conference, I had already learned of several positions that were open around the country and even information about a couple more that would be opening up soon. Several folks mentioned to me that I had a desirable skillset, which I took as a high compliment. All of these kind words were very confidence inspiring and have given me great motivation as I begin my search.

I thank all of the WAML meeting attendees for the warm hospitality, and I especially thank the WAML Executive Board for making the trip possible for me. My sincere hope is that I will be in a position to continue attending WAML meetings and become an active member of the organization. The engaging content, the meeting size, and -most of all- the people made for a fantastic conference experience. My only regret is that I did not get a chance to meet every member one-on-one. I now have a great sense of what the GIS and map librarian profession is all about, and I move forward very encouraged about my entrance into the field.

Sincerely,

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