

John Sherman - Some Recollections

I always liked maps. I used to enjoy browsing through atlases and wondering what places were like when I would place a finger at some location. When I discovered topographic maps, I made a wall mosaic of twelve of them of an area I liked to fish and hike. So I suppose it is not surprising that when I attended college at the University of Washington in 1964 that I migrated toward the geography department which offered a number of courses in cartography.

I met John Sherman in the second class in cartography. His teaching domain was a room with soaring ceilings on the top floor of Smith Hall, one of those ivy-covered brick buildings built in the 1920s that seem to epitomize a university building. On one wall were two narrow windows which provided the only real link to the outside world. However, one had to stand on a drafting table to be able to reach the base of them.

Sherman typically wore a white, short-sleeved shirt to class and proceeded to lecture in a deep, monotonic baritone voice with a gravelly quality, perhaps a result of regular smoking. Although he was not a dynamic lecturer, he projected a fascination with the use and construction of maps. When a student faced defending a proposed design for a map he would often make the comment "but did you ever stop to think about..." and then make a series of suggestions which the student hadn't really considered. He had many little projects and experiments in his mind and tried to interest students in pursuing one of them. Often he would bring unusual maps to class to encourage students to look at maps in fresh ways or at least to be aware of how their content and design reflect individual needs. These examples included a map printed on silk for use by downed military pilots, a map folded origami style so that it would snap back to a small size, a terrain model constructed of sheets of clear plastic with a contour on each level, a map printed in special inks for use under red lighting, and a map of sandpaper, noodles, and buttons for use by a blind person.

Of the numerous topics that Sherman investigated, it was the tactual map that seemed to most occupy his time and energy. He often related the story of how a blind student had come to him in the 1950s and inquired about a campus map. It was a type of map he had never thought about before and it seemed to offer a number of challenges. So over the next few weeks he attempted to develop a map that was tactually readable and contained elements that would be useful for the mobility of a blind student. For example, features such as curbs, traffic signals, benches, large open paved areas, steps, building entrances, and distinctive ambient sounds are important to blind mobility. Tactual maps also had to be presented in a three-dimensional form and this meant they were constructed out of various bits of material much like a model. The result was a rather large map on plywood which seemed to please the student.

The first campus map was too large to be carried, and so a series of smaller maps were produced. In addition it was clear that some form of copying was necessary since considerable time was required to generate each map. Sherman eventually acquired a thermoform machine which would heat a sheet of plastic and then create a vacuum under it in order to draw it tightly against a relief model. This produced inexpensive copies of the model. A real problem with all Braille maps is that the symbol density must be greatly limited to maintain readability. Sherman was able to improve on this by laminating two sheets of plastic back to back. Symbol-

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ogy was on the top and Braille was on the bottom and both sides were read simultaneously with both hands.

A problem with these copies was that they had no readable text on them and Sherman reasoned that they would be more useful if sighted persons could read them as well. Furthermore he found that visual impairment may take on a variety of forms besides total blindness. Many persons have enough vision to recognize oversized symbols and so he reasoned that maps might also be designed for sighted, partially-sighted, and totally blind persons. Thus I participated in a quest for some type of material that could be used to create an image on the thermoform plastic. The material was very resistant to inks and pens, and most photosensitive coatings would not adhere to it. Eventually we achieved a little success by first exposing the material to a color-proofing material called Kwik-Cote and then vacuuming the sheet against a tactual model.

Later he devised a number of ways of using conventional drafting materials to create visual renderings of tactual images. Negatives of these were exposed to photosensitive materials that would render a raised-relief image. In some cases these were used as models and in others they were used in the thermoform machine. One offset printing plate had a particularly durable surface and also was used for Braille elevator signs in various buildings around the campus.

John Sherman was an easy-going person and very considerate of students. I never saw him lose his temper and he would apologize after occasionally saying "damn" when something went wrong. Some of us used to laugh at his embarrassment during a summer session when George Jenks was visiting. Unlike Jenks, Sherman would use the most gentle expressions.

In all ways John Sherman was a true gentleman. He seemed fascinated by the challenge of making the map and he wanted us to join him in his exploration of them. I think I most appreciated his insistence on thinking about the function of a map before starting to produce it. Only when a topic had been thought through would one begin to assemble the graphic marks that would eventually become a map to communicate information.

*Eugene Turner
Department of Geography
California State University, Northridge*

"John Sherman was an easy-going person and very considerate of students."

A Tribute

In the autumn of 1989 I went to Hershey, Pennsylvania to attend the meetings of the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE). John Sherman was going to be there: he was to receive an award for teaching excellence at the college level, and I'd been asked if I would present something. Here is just a bit of what I said (which has not appeared in print previously):

"When I first was asked if I would present a paper at these sessions of the NCGE in honor of John Sherman, my immediate response was 'Of course; there is no question'. . . [a]s the panic grew, a letter appeared in the mail from Ev [Everett] Wingert suggesting some sort of coordinated effort, with a suggestion that BITNET might help coordination if only we all would use it. So I learned how to use BITNET from the Mac in my office. Along with the note, Ev sent a copy of a message from B. [Barbara]

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Buttenfield in which she went on at some length about a lot of things, with a passing reference to all the principles underlying wise cartography that Sherman had so skillfully nurtured in us all. It dawned upon me that here was something of great potential I might work on, so I sent a quick BITNET note to Babs [Barbara] asking if she wouldn't just note down all those principles so I could see if what she thought they were corresponded in any way with what I thought they were. I asked Ev to do the same. There was a hidden agenda here, of course: although John Sherman was my dissertation advisor, I actually had but one course from him in my life, and I hadn't the vaguest concrete idea of what his principles for wise cartography were. Ev said he couldn't remember either. . . when I started searching out written evidence of the principles, all I found in my library was the 1961 International Yearbook of Cartography with the 'Horizons' paper in it . . . but it didn't seem to be quite what I was looking for. Only when I scanned through Gene Turner's interview with Sherman in the January 1987 *The American Cartographer* did I find what I sought. John's discourse there on the issues of map design read somewhat like the outline (at least in my lecture notes) for my introductory cartography course. In this I found great comfort: I did know, after all, what John had been saying in the one class I took and during all those hours in his office talking about things and stuff, and I was in fact passing the tradition along."

Now it is many years later. I am teaching more GIS and much less cartography. I continue to be careful in my classes to ensure that my students know my background and who taught me most of what I know about the creation and interpretation of maps. I use John Campbell's text in my map-reading-and-use class, and my students know who that John is and where he learned a lot of what is in that book. In short, my students are Sherman's students even though they've never had the pleasure of meeting the man. Those principles that we've found hard to articulate for so long are in fact remarkably durable as they pass through the various professorial filters and on to today's students. Herein lies the greatest tribute I can offer to John Sherman: I was his student, my students are his students.

*Phil Kelley
Professor of Geography
Mankato State University*

My Remembrance of John Sherman

Students are seekers, pilgrims on personal journeys of transformation. Students yearn for revelations that enlighten, insights that bring their own chaotic ideas into focus. Each student's journey is unique, though others have taken the path before. Each finds the route individually, in their own time, with their own set of companions. As pilgrims, students follow their urge to explore the deepest forest, to pursue the more difficult and confusing trails in hope of gaining the most rewarding experience. Many who would take an easier route, or hesitate to start, are swept along by the enthusiasm of the group.

But in the heart of the forest the pilgrims become lost. The trail fades and there appears no clear way through. Some retreat to the familiar paths from which they entered; some panic and are immobilized by fear;

others blunder repeatedly down dead ends into thickets and bogs. Eventually the tired pilgrims chance upon a guide, a master they understand to be the guru of their pilgrimage, and eagerly ask him to show them the way out of the woods. Patiently, the guide explains that he, too, is lost, but has been there longer and so already knows many of the brambles and dead ends. "I cannot point you to the way out," he says, "but working together we will avoid the hazards and discover the rewarding paths."

John Sherman knew that the destination is often much like the journey. He knew that only by revealing himself as a seeker would the students who so urgently sought answers of him become continual learners capable of creating answers themselves. He understood that the manner in which a journey proceeds greatly affects its conclusion, and so he was reliably optimistic, kind, and patient. He quickly grasped the essence of a student's quest and walked with him or her for a while as a fellow pilgrim until the student recognized how to continue alone.

John never mistook learning for being taught. He seldom answered questions directly, but rather helped me reshape and hone a question until avenues toward explanation were revealed. He conveyed confidence in my ability to find a goal without his constant help. He made it clear that learning was my responsibility; while his as a teacher was to provide some basic tools to work with, occasional guidance when the thickets became impenetrable, and most importantly, an enthusiastic audience to witness my progress.

His greatest gift to his students was to offer each one the opportunity to re-draw their maps of themselves, to create a map on which each of us is at once a student, teacher, seeker, guide in a land where the past is never completely forgotten and the future is always brimming with opportunity. Many of us who learned from him carry such maps in our minds. When the issues are contentious, the questions baffling, the risks worrisome, when hope dims as the forest closes in, we bring out that map and consult it anew and find it again delightfully revealing.

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Tribute

My memories of John Sherman are vivid and fond. When I first met him, in 1951, he was a young faculty member in the Geography Department at the University of Washington. He immediately impressed me with his concern for students and his immersion in everything cartographic. His overarching goal was that his students should come to love the field as much as he did. In the early 1950s, a project to produce a City Guide map of Seattle and vicinity exemplified his approach.

Characteristically, John insisted that the project, which he could have mounted as a strictly commercial venture, be set up to provide a professional growth opportunity for cartography students. He made certain that students were involved in design and production planning activities, besides working on the more mundane drafting and type laying activities. He also made certain that this student labor was not exploited; the \$5/

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hour received by the workers was quite a kindly wage in those days, especially for an undergraduate. Also, John wanted the result to be a professional looking, high-quality map, by selecting appropriate lettering styles, symbols, colors, and general layout. Although the project generally met these goals, production turned out to be a bit of a problem. He found that working with inexperienced student help was a challenge, as was using the rather primitive materials and techniques of the era.

The most difficult problems arose because we used standard pen-and-ink drafting techniques on large sheets of lightweight Strathmore paper. The finished map was large, about five by eight feet, and the drawings were drawn at a larger size to give the impression of high-quality linework without requiring the sometimes clumsy students to produce fine lines (final reduction was somewhere in the 50% range). In addition, the multiple colors required separation of the art work into several layers. When a professional lithographic firm photographed the dimensionally unstable drawings, the technician who had to register the negatives for plate-making faced an almost insurmountable task. Only John's equanimity kept the project from foundering on this potentially disastrous problem. He calmed and cajoled everyone until the problems were finally resolved. Certainly, the experience burned the need for dimensionally-stable materials into all of our minds.

John was also certain that requiring a thorough field check of the source maps would ensure the accuracy of the final map. As it turned out, he was absolutely correct. Many errors were found in the source maps, including those from official sources, such as the city engineer's office. For example, we found underwater streets, platted but unbuilt subdivisions, and subdivisions occupying the sites of golf courses. In the end, we all had learned the value of field checking.

When the maps were finally printed and put into several permanent mountings at the airport and other key locations, they served travelers well for some years to come. This result was obtained only because of John's devotion to the project's goals.

John threw himself into all of his projects with enthusiasm and always involved his students in what he was doing. This was true whether he was devising illustrations of map projections, perfecting hill-shading techniques, or designing maps to serve the needs of those with vision impairments. He was a true exemplar of the best in cartography and a role model for us all.

*John Campbell
Professor Emeritus
Department of Geography
University of Wisconsin-Parkside*

Undergraduate Memories of John Sherman 1969-72

"Nevertheless, my memories of John have served me well in my own career, as a model of the qualities a professor should possess."

In my mind I can still see John Sherman walking down the fourth floor hallway of Smith Hall, wearing his seemingly never changing dark pants and white shirt, holding a lit cigarette in his right hand. Phil Muehrcke was my undergraduate advisor so I did not get to know John, then departmental chair, as well as his many graduate students did, who have contributed their recollections here. Nevertheless, my memories of John have served me well in my own career, as a model of the qualities a professor should possess.

Enthusiasm for cartography was John's first virtue. I still recall his contagious enthusiasm for map design and even for the inherently dry map intelligence class material on sources of maps. Good humor was his second wonderful personality trait. John was always friendly, cheerful, and encouraging toward students, and we hence found him very easy to talk with. This recollection is remarkable considering that I later was told that my undergraduate career at the University of Washington (UW) spanned the period immediately following his son's tragic death in Vietnam, something he never mentioned in my classes from him. Patience with students was his third great virtue. I remember John several times took the time to invite me into his cluttered office, piled high with papers, maps, books, and other cartographic treasures (to the point of being a fire hazard!) to slowly and carefully expound further upon a topic I found confusing or wanted to know more about. Interest in the cutting-edge of cartographic research was John's fourth positive quality, which was so important to his many graduate students but also to undergraduates like myself. I remember his upper division class lectures were interspersed with references to recent research and technical developments, particularly when dealing with remote sensing or tactual mapping. Indeed his design class, where we made a tactual campus map and then met with potential blind map users, was one of the most humanly rewarding events in my undergraduate years.

I believe that a little of John's enthusiasm, kindness, and patience has rubbed off on many of us and that we are much the better for it. I know that all of us will keep his memory fondly in our hearts as we miss his kind spirit.

Jon Kimerling
Corvallis, Oregon

A Tribute

I first met John Sherman toward the end of my first tumultuous year at the University of Washington (UW) which was, to put it mildly, a debacle. Entering as a scholarship forestry student, I proceeded to flunk out twice, finding it difficult to study while also majoring in long distance athletics and mountaineering. As luck would have it, I joined a co-op where a housemate, a Geography Department major, raved about the inspiring cartography curriculum. What tiny twists of fate shape one's destiny! Soon I was enrolled in the same coursework, which led to some incredible classes in the English, Far East Studies, and Geology departments, all first-rate programs and faculty. So began my introduction to the mapping sciences and to higher education.

Despite his characteristic modesty, Sherman's pre-eminence as a geographer and cartographer was well known at the time, and this of course was a source of pride and inspiration for his students and colleagues. This became evident in several ways as I proceeded in my studies. For instance, his obvious enthusiasm for the subject coupled with an unusually patient, sincere demeanor, put those around him at immediate ease and created a potent environment for scholarly discourse. This enthusiasm carried over to staff, graduate students, and students alike, resulting in a rather impressive center of cartographic excellence. I found it impossible not to immerse myself in such an environment.

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Another example of Dr. Sherman's zeal was the visibility he gave cartography within the geography curriculum. He articulated better than most scholars the cartographic body of knowledge and its relevance in modeling our environment and world. He effectively elevated the discipline to a legitimate subject, in contrast with the widely held, somewhat patronizing view of cartography as map drafting. It was also no small accomplishment that Sherman firmly but good-naturedly promoted his vision for the field of cartography before, during, and after the transition of the social sciences to quantitative methods.

It was in the area of cartographic relief representation that this man made the greatest impact on my schoolwork. He refused to let me relax at the completion of the usual 3-D class exercise, asking "Have you checked with Peucker on the algorithm he's working on? You might learn something there." Or, "Read what Jenks has to say on this. That's a good start." Before long I was into some rather involved research involving optical and photographic techniques, primarily to derive oblique views of a surface which could be graphically enhanced for illustration purposes. The cognitive advantages, if any, of this product versus the usual orthogonal map view could then be evaluated. Today, we are inundated in digital elevation data that with a few keystrokes can be manipulated and viewed at will, without the user ever having to think or understand much at all. I appreciate this capability and its potential pitfalls, perhaps more than most, having been schooled on the basic problem in the Sherman fashion.

I suppose it is trite to say that John Sherman's legacy is his commitment to his students and his profession. To those of us who knew him as a teacher, colleague, and friend, it is remarkable to observe the far-reaching effect his life work had. On a personal level, many of the acquaintances I made in those early days have been cherished friends and professional associates ever since. Unquestionably, Sherman proteges have achieved an impressive record in their own right in academic pursuits, research, government programs, and a vastly improved cartographic design standard. The richness he brought to all of our lives will not be forgotten.

Karl Johansen

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Tribute to Professor Sherman

I was a student of Dr. John Sherman's primarily from 1982 through 1984. He was an institution in the Department of Geography on the fourth floor of Smith Hall at the University of Washington, and he was nearing the end of his career. As a young student studying cartography, I was eager to learn all that this great, but unimposing man could teach me about making maps. However, as I realized many years later, the most profound lessons I took with me had less to do with my education in cartography than they had to do with life.

First of all, he always had a warm smile for his students. His face, his attitude, his gait, his mannerisms all conveyed a desire to see the best in others. This came through in the constant smile that I can still see as clearly as though he were smiling at me at this moment.

Secondly, he successfully answered the question a lot of people spend a lifetime trying to formulate. That was "How can I use the knowledge I

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*"How can I use the knowledge I
have to serve humanity?"*

have to serve humanity?" Dr. Sherman did this through the successful development of maps for the blind.

Last of all, an event that I witnessed in his office as I was discussing my senior thesis with him, had a strong impact on me. The phone rang and it was the department's secretary telling him that his wife, Helen, was on the line. As he apologized to me for the interruption, he picked up the phone, smiling broadly, and with unbridled affection said, "Hi Honey." Such a simple statement, yet I can still hear the love in his words as he spoke to his wife. As he clutched the receiver with his left hand, I noticed hundreds of tiny scratches on his shiny, gold wedding band, evidence that he had been married for a very long time. Judging by the way he was talking to his wife on the phone, his marriage was a commitment he not only took seriously, but embraced with happiness.

Clearly, Dr. Sherman was a man of great character and integrity. He always looked for the best in people, he used his knowledge of cartography to serve humanity, and he honored his marriage extraordinarily by small, ordinary acts. These very profound but simple things, in addition to the art and science of cartography, are what I learned from Professor John Sherman fifteen years ago. Now, I am no longer a cartographer. I have since become an artist, yet the things I learned from him continue to serve me well today.

Mary Stewart Aslin
B.A. with distinction in Geography, 1984
University of Washington

Recollections of John Sherman

When I arrived at the University of Washington in the fall of 1969 John Sherman was the Geography Department Chairperson. He was a busy man. In part this was due to his active intellect. His mind was full of ideas and plans. Since he was also unselfishly motivated to help others, he always seemed to be working on a series of projects, trying to finish some while nurturing others into being.

More than anything John loved mapping. Indeed, he was "Mr. Cartography" to the Seattle region. His skill and energy were limitless when it came to convincing others of the magical powers of well-designed maps. He and [his wife] Helen tirelessly worked away evenings, weekends, and vacations in their home studio for almost no financial reward to ensure that these maps were completed. Thus, John was one of the few academic cartographers who also practiced what he taught. Much of his cartographic legacy rests in the design standards set in the maps he produced. Although most of the skill and knowledge he exhibited in these maps never got into the professional literature, his students benefited tremendously from his vast practical mapping experience.

John was also a cartographic visionary. He was deeply interested in theoretical and conceptual issues related to cartography. Evidence of his imagination and insight cluttered his office. He surrounded himself with research reports and one-of-a-kind map projects that he used in his teaching. John was a pioneer in nurturing the emerging field of analytical cartography. Waldo [Tobler], of course, came out of that environment. I was brought to Washington to develop a curriculum in analytical cartography. When I decided to move from Seattle to Madison after spending only four years in the Washington department, John apologized for the

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little time he had been able to spend with me. He assured me that when he no longer was department chair he would have the time needed to work with me to build the cartography program we had planned. But I knew that it was not to be. John's attention and energy always would be spread widely among ideas, projects, department, profession, family, and friends. Thank goodness, that was John. He was a man of grace and intellect and action.

I regret that John and I drifted apart after I left Washington. My leaving apparently was as awkward for him as it was for me. He had been a real father figure for me in a professional sense, so it felt like I was leaving home. I did always remember him as a cherished colleague and friend, however. I will miss John. And I feel particularly sad for those who will never have the chance to know this very special person as I did.

Phil Muehrcke
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