



## LETTER FROM THE PAST-PRESIDENT

I can hardly believe I am nearing completion of my fourth and final year of the NACIS presidential track, from October 2019 through October 2023. While the pandemic created a whirlwind of change in the world around us all, I feel fortunate to have been part of NACIS, a volunteer-based organization focused on bringing our members together as a community. Our annual conferences were a port in the pandemic storm and served as an important way to gather and share, both in person and virtually.

During planning of the 2020 conference, I stood in awe of Mamata Akella as she led the effort to pivot from an in-person to a fully online conference. This was only possible with assistance, creative input, patience, and technological mastery from so many people, from the presenters (who had to shift to either pre-recording their presentation or delivering it live online), to our partners at e3 Webcasting, to our members who proved enthusiastic about using new tools to exchange ideas and socialize. For the 2020 conference, I organized Practical Cartography Day, and thank co-moderators Ross Thorn and Katie Perry for their tireless work to make it a success.

In planning the 2021 conference, we had hoped to get back to a fully in-person format, but COVID—namely the Delta variant—had other plans. A fully online conference would have meant a huge monetary loss to our organization, so our amazing Business Manager Susan Peschel was able to re-negotiate our contract with the venue in Oklahoma City, allowing us to have a hybrid conference. Although we had experience with organizing both an in-person and an online conference, I must admit that at times it felt like a hybrid conference was such a huge lift that it couldn't have been possible without extra help from everyone who worked so tirelessly to make successful. Of special note, thank you to Director of Continuity Ginny Mason, Director of Operations Nick Martinelli, Associate Business Manager Martha Bostwick, Secretary Hans van der Maarel, and Treasurer Mary Beth Cunha, for their constant guidance and support. One of my personal highlights of the meeting was the keynote speakers recommended by our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee: Tristan Ahtone and Bobby Lee, who talked about “Land Grab Universities.” Another was the panel session entitled “A More Inclusive Career Panel,” in which Vanessa Knoppke-Wetzel, Tanya Buckingham Andersen, Rosemary Wardley, Hannah Dormido, and Bill Limpisathian spoke frankly and insightfully of career challenges that may not be apparent to our broader membership.

The NACIS Annual Meeting and all other activities in the Society run on volunteers. While there is not space enough to mention everyone who has contributed to NACIS during my tenure, I would like to thank a few dedicated volunteers who have served in critical roles: Alex Fries, who has done so much as our Social Media Coordinator; Bill Limpisathian, who oversees our Slack channels; Amy Rock, who makes our Map Gallery such a success; and Kate Leroux, who informs us all with NACIS News.

Publications are also important to our efforts to engage with, build, and grow our cartographic community. The *Atlas of Design* continues to be way to showcase the best of our mapping and design efforts in print, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Edition is jaw-dropping. Thank you to Editors Nat Case, Josh Ryan, Tracy Tien, and Aaron Koelker for their efforts. *Cartographic Perspectives*, our society's journal, continues to provide the highest quality content for academics, professionals, and map lovers alike. I would like to thank Amy Griffin for leading these efforts as Editor over the last six years, and I am so excited that Jim Thatcher has assumed the role of Editor with new, creative ideas.

I have also thoroughly enjoyed working with all the at-large members of the Board these last years. Their energy and commitment to a better NACIS is palpable, and together we continue to do so much to maintain and improve our organization. Board members channel their many of their efforts via committees, and I applaud the significant accomplishments of the Awards, Communications and Outreach, NACIS Store, Membership Analytics, and DEI Committees. One new initiative of note is the Mentor Program, which we hope broadens opportunities in an inclusive manner.

One of the most important emerging priorities at NACIS during my term was a focus on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. These efforts began a few years ago as a subcommittee of the Communications and Outreach Committee when Rosemary Wardley was Chair, and have grown to the point that DEI now has its own committee, one that is present and active in all we do. The number of non-Board volunteers on the DEI Committee illustrates to me how important these goals are to so many members. Thank you to our DEI Committee and its leaders, including past-Chair Vanessa Knoppke-Wetzel and current Chairs Travis White and Hannah Dormido, for moving our work forward.

I often reflect on how fortunate I am to have been in a leadership position while DEI has become an increasingly critical initiative at NACIS. We all bring our personal experiences and unique perspectives to programs and projects, and can grow by examining things through different lens. As we continue this journey together—and as excitement builds for NACIS 2023 in Pittsburgh in October—I will share with you a personal statement of my life and observations beginning at age three, by first zooming in on my childhood home in Pittsburgh and then slowing zooming out.

Zoom 1, covering a parcel 35 feet wide, encompasses my childhood home. Its occupants are diverse in age and gender, and include my grandpa, dad, mom, identical aunt, and the next generation: two girls plus two boys born in the span of just over four years. The men spoke in soft brogues when planning to convert the upstairs bathroom into a fourth bedroom and the hall closet into the bathroom so that we could all fit in this small brick house.

Zoom 2 is a 300-foot radius, and includes St. Bede's Church. Each Sunday at church we could see the diversity that our parish had to offer, a collection of Catholic immigrants and

their offspring that have come from Poland, Italy, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and elsewhere to work at primarily blue-collar jobs. In a few years, after my dad's death in 1972, my mom would become secretary at the elementary school attached to the church, and her work proved a constant source of purpose, pride, and joy in her life until she retired at age 70.

Zoom 3, at 1,500 ft, reveals most of Point Breeze, which was also Mac Miller, Annie Dillard, and Mr. Rogers's neighborhood. When I was not much older than three, my mom would send me to Frick Park Market, later made famous by Mac Miller's song, to pick up a missing dinner

item. I'd pass by the previous home of Annie Dillard, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Tinker at Pilgrim Creek*, who wrote of her early explorations of this same neighborhood in *An American Childhood*. I would sometimes go to a slightly larger grocer over the hill in the other direction, passing by the residence of Fred Rogers of PBS fame, who used his national platform in simple and subtle manners to promote inclusivity.

Zoom 4, at 3,500 ft, shows the boundaries of Point Breeze and increasing diversity. To the north is Penn Avenue which served as the de-facto and sharp boundary with the predominantly African-American neighborhood of Homewood. To the west was the much more porous boundary with the traditionally Jewish neighborhood of Squirrel Hill. The first landmark encountered while walking to Squirrel Hill was the Tree of Life Synagogue, the site of the 2018 shooting that left eleven people dead, including survivors of the Holocaust.

Zoom 5, at 3 miles, shows a traditional Pittsburgh workplace. The neighborhood of Homestead included the closest steel mill to our house, the USS Homestead Steel Works, first acquired by Andrew Carnegie in 1883 and the site of the deadly 1892 Homestead Strike. Some steel mills in Pittsburgh were still glowing bright at night when we drove by them in my youth, but the decline of steel production was a constant topic of conversation. It was not uncommon to hear the lament that inexpensive steel imported from southeast Asia was a threat to the city's livelihood.

Zoom 6, at 5 miles, includes the neighborhood of Oakland, where changes were in the air. As a child, the most exciting spot in this neighborhood was Forbes Field, where Roberto Clemente played baseball for the Pirates, the first team to field an all Hispanic, Latino, and Black lineup in 1971. Roberto was from Puerto Rico, a heritage he shared with 0.5% of Pittsburgh residents. A victim of systemic racism throughout the league, Roberto chose to



My childhood home, as painted by my daughter Jamie Kennelly.

focus on charitable work, which led to his fatal plane crash on New Year's Eve in 1972 while delivering aid to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

I later attended high school in Oakland when everyone was abuzz about early organ transplants occurring a few blocks down the road at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Few at that time would likely have predicted that UPMC and Pitt would eventually supplant traditional industrial giants as Pittsburgh's largest employer, pumping new lifeblood into the city's economy. A few blocks up the street in the other direction from my high school was Carnegie Mellon University, a burgeoning hub for science and engineering. CMU was instrumental in adding high-tech to the diversity of industry in Pittsburgh and its neighborhoods. The old Nabisco Bakery on Penn Avenue, which was close enough to waft mouth-watering scents into Point Breeze during my childhood, became the Pittsburgh headquarters of Google at Bakery Square, after they outgrew a smaller office space on the CMU campus. CMU alumnus Andy Warhol exemplifies how a new art scene contributed to Pittsburgh's resurgence, when an old industrial warehouse in Pittsburgh's North Shore neighborhood was converted into the Andy Warhol Museum in 1994. Such revitalization in turn has led to a greater diversity of people calling Pittsburgh and its neighborhoods home.

While my youthful glimpses into many aspects important to DEI were peripheral, I like to think that what my daughter Jamie (who was fortunate enough to get to know my childhood home and Point Breeze) calls "being a Pittsburgher at heart" instills some of the city's best values into me. It's my hope to use these values to continue to support DEI efforts at NACIS, as we progress on our journey and contribute positive change to our community and the world.

I am excited to return to my hometown with all of you this year for 2023 NACIS at Station Square—our conference at the confluence. Station Square is a renovated railroad station that offers final glimpses of the Monongahela before it merges with the Allegheny to form the Ohio River at Point State Park. Pittsburgh has so much to offer our group, with its rich history and geography, good food, and wonderful culture. I look forward to seeing you there!

***Pat Kennelly***

NACIS Past-President

February 2023

