

In Memory of Bill Loy October 13, 1936 – November 15, 2003

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Bill Loy made a substantial contribution to American cartography, not through any theoretical breakthrough, nor through the development of a traditional grant-based research program, but instead through the cumulative effects of his personality. Bill left a legacy of two admired state atlases, a vital university cartography lab, and students whose maps are ever prevalent in American cartography. His career, and his accomplishments were a testimony to the long-term efficacy of gentle determination.

Bill was, literally, a Boy Scout. He actually wore a Boy Scout tie tack—not to mention the tie it kept in place—at many University events where the prevailing style was decidedly Left Coast Academic. He was a regular churchgoer, and was actively engaged in his Naval Reserve duties (in that capacity he was Commander Loy). This was not another side of Bill Loy...it is who he was.

Other renegade Boy Scouts, like me (I never made it past Tenderfoot), will probably recall the Oath...a sort of Boy Scout catechism. As I remember it, a Scout is Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent. Well, in fact Bill was every one of those things. I have to admit, that's a great set of lived values in a boss and a colleague.

Bill was always ready to see the positive in someone, to see the best in someone's efforts. That generosity was frequently a problem in the mid 1970s for me and for text author Clyde Patton during the first Atlas of Oregon project. Bill would bring in some student work on an Atlas topic and propose, hopefully, that it really was pretty good, and would probably fit the bill. We would roll our eyes, throw it out, and insist that the subject had to be done better, which meant the two of us taking on yet ANOTHER page pair, from scratch. Bill would say, "Well, if you think you really can manage to find the time to do this, it certainly WOULD be better." So we always did find the time. Looking back, one could wonder whether there wasn't a Tom Sawyer-whitewashing-the-fence aspect to this, but Bill didn't work that way. Having gotten the Atlas funded, he worked tirelessly; usually seven days a week, to make sure it happened on schedule and on budget. If that meant accepting some inadequate pages, he would accept them, even if that required kidding himself that they weren't THAT bad. But, his willingness to see the best in what was delivered never blinded him to the advantages of what was better, if it was available. When the first Atlas of Oregon was a critical success, he told everyone that its high quality was due to Kai-Yu Fung's pioneer work (on the Atlas of Saskatchewan, Bill's adopted model), and to all the talent that Clyde, myself and everyone else had put into it. When pressed, he allowed that his own organizational efforts had been helpful.

Bill's positive attitude was easy to become accustomed to, and then to subsequently take for granted. Ten years after the Atlas of Oregon's first edition, I got a salutary reality check, when Allan Cartography displayed at an AAG meeting, the just-printed Raven Maps of eleven western states. The final production phase had involved fine-tuning our basic color

sequence, and duotone shading treatment for each map individually. In those pre-digital days, each map proof required most of a day's work, and hundreds of dollars worth of film, proofing base, and dyes. We must have re-composited and re-proofed fifty times. By the time we got to the meeting with our maps still smelling of ink, we were deeply in hock to the bank, and physically exhausted. An eminent cartographer then marched up to the booth where we proudly displayed our wares, surveyed the maps, and made a single comment: "Why have you used the same old color scheme?" We restrained ourselves from knocking the eminent man to the floor, and, in the aftermath, began to appreciate just what an exceptionally nurturing force Bill Loy had been...and continued to be.

Bill wangled startup funding for a program in computer cartography at the University of Oregon. He believed that students needed training in the new map production techniques, and Bill wanted to be ready for an eventual second edition of the Atlas of Oregon. Bill was encouraging everyone who showed interest in cartography, and he enthusiastically promoted students who demonstrated a natural ability or gift for it. More than a thousand students enrolled in Bill's cartography courses, along with ten times as many in his other geography courses. Bill's active constructive involvement in the wider community won him the University of Oregon's Distinguished Service Award for significant contribution to the cultural development of Oregon, an honor very rarely given to faculty members.

When funding for a second edition of the Atlas of Oregon was announced in 1999, Bill had already taken early retirement (he was battling Parkinson's disease, and also felt that the next generation of cartographers needed the university salary more than he did). Never-the-less, he happily plunged back into the endless organizational and administrative work of atlas building as an un-paid volunteer. Bill felt deeply fortunate to have a second crack at such a project, this time with the full capabilities of both GIS and image processing available to the cartographer. These technologies make practically anything possible, but in the end there was still a budget and a schedule to adhere to. Bill worked tirelessly on both budget and schedule—rather, given his illness, he worked until he was bone tired, and then he kept on working. He took great pleasure from the fine work coming from the InfoGraphics Lab in the Department of Geography at Oregon State. As page pairs for the Atlas gradually emerged, Bill cajoled contributors, cheered cartographers, and kept the entire project on track. At the same time, he was perfectly clear about terminating topics that simply weren't working out. Bill asserted that we had a schedule to keep, and we were going to keep it. Gene Martin and I took on a set of population center reference maps, and were so enthusiastic about the early results that we found ourselves repeatedly expanding the coverage, until the 14 originally allotted pages had grown to over 50. At that point we realized that we would have to try to persuade Bill to consider a major change in the table of contents that he'd been devoting so much attention to. We gingerly brought up the problem, seeking to put the best face on our recklessness in pursuing a single topic to such lengths. Bill didn't hesitate a moment telling us "Go for it, that's great, it'll be a better Atlas, we'll find a way to do it."

This unexpected flexibility was in fact a classic application of a favorite Bill Loy adage: "We accept constructive criticism—if you'll construct it, we'll accept it." It also reflected his practical recognition that some contributors were not going to deliver the work they had promised. Bill was, in fact, quite realistic about this. He looked for the best in everyone, but he didn't necessarily expect it. A couple of years ago, Bill and I were discussing dissension on the Board of a large local non-profit corporation.

Bill observed that such organizations tended to develop peacefully and productively to the point of maturity—"and then things get ugly." This unsentimental clarity about good work, and the pitfalls of atlas production was typical of Bill..."dwell on the positive, but don't kid yourself...that is simply the way that things are...in the meantime, make sure you can meet your minimum commitment, then do what you can to improve on that."

In the fall of 2003, at the Portland meeting of the American Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, Bill was looking frail. He'd had surgery for cancer in a salivary duct some months before, and a recent follow-up biopsy. He explained to me that he'd have to miss a session at the conference to keep a phone appointment with his doctor. I followed him to the pay phones a while later, only to find him quietly contemplative. His doctor told him that there was reason for concern, but not for alarm. Bill and I sat for a while, and talked about this and that. During our talk, the problems of an acquaintance came up. Bill commented that the man had not been successful at much of anything—and that we, on the other hand, had done good work, had been recognized for it, and were very lucky. For us, it was a good world. Two months later, with radiation ineffective, Bill still had his eye on the positive side. He noted that he no longer had to worry about the Parkinson's disease.

Bill wrote an account of his life that was read at his planned memorial. He titled the account, "Lucky Bill".