

# In Remembrance of Arthur H. Robinson

## Arthur H. Robinson: An Appreciation

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*Original Survey and Land Subdivision in Rural Ohio*

The name Arthur H. Robinson first came to my attention in the early 1950's when I was working as a cartographer in the Virginia Geographical Institute, while also a student at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Erwin Raisz had recently come to Virginia from the Institute of Geographical Exploration at Harvard University to teach cartography. In my presence, he opened a copy of Robinson's then new book (which had just arrived in the mail) *The Look of Maps: An Examination of Cartographic Design*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1952. Upon leafing through this slim volume, which has several figures and tables but no maps, Raisz remarked: "*The Look of Maps*, no maps to look at!"

This illustrates an important difference between the two men who, either singly or overlapping, dominated academic cartography in the United States for some fifty years (c. 1932 - 1982). Raisz was a practitioner, and Robinson a theoretician. However, neither scholar was born in the United States. Erwin Raisz (d. 1963) had emigrated from Hungary after serving in the sappers (engineers) for the Central Powers in World War I. The much younger Robinson was born of American parents in Canada, and partly schooled in England. Both received their doctoral degrees in the United States after wartime service, which was important to their subsequent careers, and both wrote influential and widely used textbooks.

During World War II, from 1941 through 1945, Arthur Robinson was Chief of the Map Division of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and Chief United States Map Officer for the Cairo and Quebec (Allied) Conferences. Following this, he took a Ph. D. degree in the Department of Geography at Ohio State University, where he studied under Professors Guy-Harold Smith and Roderick Peattie, both of whom were helpful to Robinson in his, at the time, unorthodox dissertation research. The work became the basis of his first book. *The Look of Maps*. In 1953 I left Virginia for the University of Wisconsin, Madison where I had been awarded a four year Fellowship to work under then Associate Professor Robinson as one of his first three doctoral graduate students in cartography. Robinson was soon promoted to full Professor. Prior to coming to the United States, I had spent four years in the Survey of India and one year in the (British) Directorate of Colonial (later Overseas) Surveys. On Professor Robinson's recommendation, probably recalling his own wartime experience, I was given generous academic credit for this work, which was mainly concerned with photogrammetry and large scale, topographic mapping.

However, from Arthur Robinson I learned an entirely different kind of cartography, small-scale thematic (or as the British call it, "special

purpose") mapping. Robinson was then working on his seminal research articles on thematic maps, for example, "The 1837 Maps of Henry Drury Harness" published in *The Geographical Journal* of the Royal Geographical Society of London, vol. 121, 1955. Of this study, R (aleigh) A(shlin) Skelton, at the time Map Librarian at the British Museum Map Room (now the Map Division of the British Library), and a leading historian of cartography, remarked: "That article certainly opened up some eyes over here [in Britain], and we now always show Harness's atlas to groups of university students who come to the Map Room." Harness was an English Army Officer working in Ireland in the early 19th Century, which makes Robinson's discovery all the more remarkable. At this time Robinson was also working on the thematic map innovations of the Frenchmen, Adrien Baubi and Charles Minard.

Arthur Robinson, jointly with the historical geographer Andrew H. Clark, taught a special one-time graduate seminar at Wisconsin on the United States Public Land Survey (USPLS) system. From this seminar I developed the topic of my doctoral dissertation on American cadastral surveys, later expanded as my first book *Original Survey and Land Subdivision*.

About this time Robinson was awarded a contract from the Mountain Research Unit of the United States Army to map part of the Central Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Being otherwise committed, he asked me to undertake the necessary fieldwork. This I was very happy to do, not having previously been to the Western United States. He was very helpful in supervising the project, which resulted in some classified publications, and two jointly authored articles: "A New Method of Terrain Representation," *Geographical Review*, 47 (1957); and "On Surface Representation Using Traces of Parallel Inclined Planes," *Annals of the A.A.G.*, 59 (1969). I was greatly honored to co-publish with my major professor, and these articles were extremely helpful in my academic career, appearing in print soon after I was appointed as a faculty member at UCLA.

After I moved to California I continued to interact professionally with Robbie, as his close associates called him, and he invited me to present a University Lecture at Wisconsin on the astronomer Edmond Halley as cartographer, on which I was working for my Hakluyt Society volumes, published in 1980. For over forty years Robinson's *Elements of Cartography*, first published by John Wiley and Sons in 1953, and several later editions, was the leading cartography text in the English language. However, Robinson's most enduring legacy may well be his work on map projections, and his studies in the history of cartography. The Robinson Projection has been widely adopted for atlases and texts. Dr. Helen Wallis, Skelton's successor as Map Librarian of the British Museum and later the first Map Librarian of the British Library, was joint author, with Robinson, of *Cartographic Innovations: An International Handbook of Mapping Terms to 1900*. This monumental study was published by *The Map Collector Publications Ltd.* in 1982, and in association with the International Cartographic Association, in 1987. It is an important contribution to the history of cartography, especially that neglected period, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Robinson's special interest.

Professor Robinson received many honors, perhaps the greatest being President of the International Cartographic Association. He had an ideal training for a career in academic cartography. The son of a distinguished professor of institutional history, Arthur Robinson had experience in government mapping before committing himself to academe. He was an excellent teacher, especially at the graduate level, but never lost sight of the fact that, as a faculty member at a research university, as he advised

his graduate students, "you also have a responsibility to your profession, through publication." He practiced what he preached by publishing in major journals and with several scholarly presses throughout his career, and inspired his students to do likewise. It is an honor to pay tribute to such an outstanding scholar, mentor, and friend. Having, surprisingly, received a Guggenheim Fellowship before Arthur Robinson, it was my pleasure to recommend him for this distinction. This helped me repay the great debt I had incurred to one of the leading cartographers of the Twentieth Century.

## Arthur H. Robinson: Reflections on the Personage

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I was privileged to be closely associated with Arthur H. Robinson, professionally, for slightly over twenty years (1962-1983). We shared faculty teaching and research duties at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for fifteen of those years and I was a graduate student under his tutelage for almost six years. Prior, we both attained undergraduate degrees from Miami University in Oxford, OH, having both attended high schools in southwestern Ohio, and much later, we both served terms as President of the International Cartographic Association. Between my high school years and my term as ICA President, I got to know a great man who provided me with examples and assurances of many of the basic tenets that have guided my life, a fantastic "role model", and yes, a "father" figure. In this short essay, I hope to touch on some of those characteristics of Arthur H. Robinson, the man, not Arthur H. Robinson, the Dean of American Cartography.

Robbie was born in Montreal, but grew up in Oxford, Ohio. Oxford, the home of Miami (Ohio) University, is (was) a quiet small town in extreme southwestern Ohio, approximately 30 miles north of the Ohio River and a couple miles from the Indiana border. Oxford had about 1000-1500 inhabitants during Robbie's formative years. He was the son of a Professor of History, and experienced the advantages of educationally demanding parents. Spending one high school year in England and attending Tallawanda High School in Oxford along with the children of other Miami faculty, Robbie was fortunate to be introduced to the broadly liberal education that is still characteristic of growing up in cities like Madison, WI, Ann Arbor, MI, or Austin TX. Continuing his education at Miami University, well known for its quality Arts and Sciences undergraduate program, enhanced his education. To my knowledge he had one sibling, a sister who became a Professor of Art at the University of Hawaii.

What are the characteristics of this man that impressed me, or that were impressed upon me? There are five that portray the human side of Arthur Robinson: (1) an open-mindedness to change, (2) non-presumptiveness