

JAMES O. WHEELER, 1938—2010: AN APPRECIATION

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James O. Wheeler, March 7, 1938—December 9, 2010

On December 9, 2010, James O. Wheeler, a founding editor of *Urban Geography*, its co-editor for more than 20 years, an inspirational colleague, and generous friend, died at the age of 72. For those of us who have spent a half-century working shoulder to

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shoulder with Jim in the urban-economic geography business, his passing hurts in several ways.

A Great Colleague. One is personal. Jim and I were almost exactly the same age, he a few weeks older. We met as graduate students—he at Indiana and I at Minnesota—during a West Lakes AAG meeting in the early 1960s, a time when enthusiasm for new questions, new ideas, and new methods of geographical inquiry was palpable.

But I'm not alone in my personal appreciation of Jim; he had many fans. A fellow geographer wrote of his fond memories of Jim, over a period of four decades, as one of the nicest colleagues he ever had the privilege to know, "a true gentleman, always encouraging, and invariably positive about the discipline and its practitioners. Just last year he wrote me a note about something I had written in his typically enthusiastic way, a busy man taking the time to say something pleasant, brightening a day, and bringing a smile. It is an honor to have known him as a friend."

A Prolific Scholar. Another is the loss of a major scholar who worked nonstop to understand the hierarchical organization of American metropolitan areas as well as their internal spatial organization and daily operation. Jim explored through careful empirical analysis how urban transportation systems support urban economy and society. His investigations shed fresh light on the social complexity of cities, the pushes and pulls regulating migration to and from urban centers, the industrial organization of the metropolitan economy, the corporate structure of American cities, and the nature of information flows and other traffic connecting America's metropolitan regions. Jim published a wealth of over 150 articles, books, chapters, bibliographies, editorials, and book reviews, his work appearing in the leading geographical journals.

In 2005, Brian Berry and Jim Wheeler published *Urban Geography in America: Paradigms and Personalities*, a "50-year history of urban geography in America as told by its participants" (Berry and Wheeler, 2005, p. ix). Jim and Brian shared an abiding interest in the history of scientific ideas and professional practice. This book sprang from a several-year effort to document how our subfield flourished from the late 1950s onward. The project began when Jim organized a session on "Urban Geography in the 1960s" for the New York AAG meeting (2001), with invited papers later published in this journal (Wheeler, 2001). Jim and Brian organized a second session for the Los Angeles meeting (2002) titled "Urban Geography in the 1970s" (Wheeler, 2002). Two more sessions followed at the New Orleans AAG meeting (2003) focusing on the 1980s and 1990s (Wheeler, 2003a; 2003b).

Jim's work ethic was extraordinary, as were the high standards he set for himself with his commitment to excellence in teaching and advising as well as to his energetic program of research and scholarly publication. In retirement, he continued working to innovate in urban economic geography, but always with his consistently high standards. He completed a manuscript in 2008 that an editor was eager to see published with revisions, but when Jim saw the reviews he concluded that it needed more serious empirical analysis and set about to update his data, a task that was under way when he died. Jim received the AAG Honors award for his scholarly achievements in 1989, a tribute that was well deserved and of which he was especially proud.

A Skilled Editor. We have also lost a master editor, one almost without peer in geography. He was founding co-editor (with Reginald Golledge) of *Urban Geography* (1980–2002), editor of *The Southeastern Geographer* (1992–2003), and editor of the *Transportation Geographer Newsletter* (1982–1984). He served on the editorial boards of a half-dozen

geographical journals, in addition to regularly guest-editing special issues of these journals. As chair of the AAG Publication Committee he was notably constructive in supporting the work of the Association's journal editors.

Until he stepped aside as our editor in 2003, Jim was *Urban Geography's* prime mover and chief workhorse. He made it a point to know and to get along with as many urban geographers as he could, both young and old, and to encourage newcomers and graduate students. He was especially easy and constructive to work with.

A Generous Teacher and Advisor. Jim was a highly effective teacher and advisor to 24 M.A. and 22 Ph.D. students. He was eager to see his students get their work published as their careers were being launched, and worked closely and generously with them on jointly authored publications. Also notable was Jim's strong support and encouragement of young faculty and his frequent efforts to help advance their scholarly development and enhance their publication records. He was most supportive in offering to collaborate as co-author, or simply by offering a helping hand in reviewing a manuscript or supplying thoughtful and gentle suggestions for improvement.

A Life in Full. At retirement, Jim was the Merle Prunty, Jr., Professor of Geography in the Department of Geography at the University of Georgia. Jim was born in Muncie, Indiana, the son of educators Emerson Franklin Wheeler and Ruby Rachel McCreery Wheeler. He attended Indiana public schools, received his B.S. degree in 1959 from Ball State Teachers College (majoring in English). After three years of teaching English and geography in junior high and high school, he completed graduate work in geography at Indiana University, where he received his M.A. (1963) and Ph.D. (1966).

His early teaching career at the college level included positions at Indiana University-Gary (1963–1964), Ohio State University (1964–1965), Western Michigan University (1965–1967), and Michigan State University (1967–1971). He joined the Geography faculty of the University of Georgia in 1971, served as department head from 1975 to 1983, and retired in 1999. He served as head of two divisions of the Association of American Geographers, first as chair of the East Lakes Division and later as president of the Southeastern Division of the AAG.

Jim is survived by his wife, Dr. Emily George Wheeler; son Alan Wheeler, and daughters Dian W. Higgenbotham and Carrie Elise Wheeler; sisters Mary M. Burris and Rachel Willis; brother Robert Wheeler; and five grandchildren.

The Wheeler Legacy. Jim was named Honorary and Founding Editor of *Urban Geography* beginning with Vol. 24, No. 1 (2003). During his tenure as co-editor of *UG*, the journal doubled in size, from 4 to 8 issues a year, and became internationally recognized as one of the leading journals publishing original research in urban studies.

He established and administered the manuscript review process for the journal, and drew from his deep knowledge of the discipline to identify an expansive inventory of peer reviewers. He also continued throughout his tenure to contribute both empirical research and editorials for publication in *UG*.

Urban Geography may be Jim Wheeler's prime legacy, but all of the young scholars he helped launch, his collaborations with colleagues, his contributions to scholarship, education, and his professional statesmanship stand as testimony to a warm and wonderful colleague, generous, hard-working, and highly accomplished. We owe him much and will miss him greatly.

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