

# Hubert (Bert) O. Johnson III

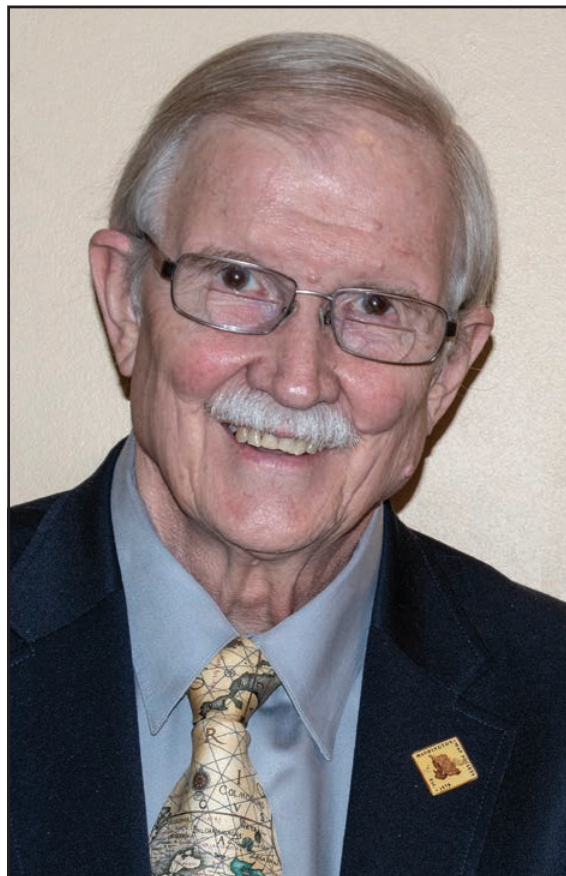
## (October 16, 1946–November 7, 2019)

*A Tribute by Evelyn Edson*

Bert Johnson, long-time member and staunch supporter of the Washington Map Society, died on November 7 of pulmonary fibrosis. He was 73. He graduated from American University with a B.A. in International Relations in 1968 and earned an M.A. in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Utah. He joined the U.S. Air Force after college, serving in the Office of Special Investigations, and traveling all over the world—England, Libya, Iran, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Egypt, Japan, Spain. After retiring from the military, he worked as a private contractor for three agencies in the intelligence community. “We loved overseas duty,” he wrote for an alumni publication, “but it was not a paid vacation. The hours were long and not without risk.”

His travels fueled his love of maps. “Can recall playing with maps at age four,” he wrote. “Still playing over half a century later.” Bert joined the Washington Map Society in 1992, and served in many leadership and service roles, including president, vice-president, program chair, membership chair and board member. He was a great supporter of the Ristow Prize and served as chair of the competition from 1995–96 and 2003–5. As Ristow chair during the last decade I called on Bert repeatedly for help and sage advice. He was also active in the Texas Map Society and IMCoS (International Map Collectors’ Society) and was on the Board of the Fry-Jefferson Society at the Library of Virginia. After his retirement he worked as a volunteer in the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress. At the Washington Map Society, he was active in promoting the Facebook page and making the Society a presence on the web.

His research interests were many and varied, including maps on wine labels, Joseph Roux (1725–93), commercial hydrographer of Marseilles, and the Great Map of Rhigas Pheraios (1757–98), early martyr for Greek independence. He was also interested in maps and views of Tripoli, especially the Karamanlis Dynasty (1711–1835). He enjoyed attending international conferences, attending nine consecutive gatherings of the International Conference on the History of Cartography from 1999 to 2015. “Great for getting to know the people who wrote all those books in my library.” He was a regular contributor to *The Portolan*, publishing over three dozen articles,



including book reviews and reports on international conferences. The recent *Portolan* (Winter 2019) contained his review of *Mediterranean Cartographic Stories: Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century Masterpieces from the Syliva Ioannou Foundation Collection*, edited by Panagiotis N. Doukellis. In other recent issues he reviewed a book on maps of Monaco, and my book on Cristoforo Buondelmonti’s atlas of the Greek islands. His final article, *Three Tiny Islands of Crete*, completed several months before his death, appears in this issue of *The Portolan*.

The history of cartography world is known for being a friendly one—partly because there are no jobs to fight over—but also because of people like Bert. Like many others, I always looked for him at meetings, and remember



Bert's auto license tag (He promoted the WMS everywhere he drove.)

one particularly endless formal banquet completely saved for me by sitting next to Bert. Tributes have been pouring in from the map world where he had so many friends. Kris Butler, recent president of the Boston Map Society, described how she stumbled on the Washington Map Society in 2005 and met Bert. "I was winding down a ten-year marriage," she writes, "starting a new life and a new job in a new city and felt free for the first time to explore my own interests, one of which was (and still is) cartography." When she told Bert about a curious collection of maps she had seen, he encouraged her to write up a proposal for the Budapest meeting of the ICHC. She did, and her proposal, concerning the cartography of U.S. Appalachian Lumber, Coal, and Mining Rights, was accepted. "While frankly not a brilliant presentation," she says, "it changed my life." "Bert was my 'map dad,'" giving guidance and inspiration to her as well as many others. "He inspired people to explore their map passions and supported them when they had doubts about their credibility. He was a champion of map enthusiasts, and I believe he would love to be remembered that way."

Cyrus Ala'i writes, "He had spent a long time in Iran and was well familiar with Persian culture. He wrote two superb reviews of my books, *General and Special Maps of Persia*, both published in *The Portolan*. I owe a lot to him and never will forget his friendly face."

Dennis Gurtz sent in a recollection of working with Bert in 1968 when they were both college students and members of the service fraternity, Alpha Phi Omega. Together they organized a national convention. "We coordinated the work of 11 sub-committees spread over about eight universities. It was a big job, but the 3-day convention went very well for the 1400 who attended. We

never saw each other again until one of my very first WMS meetings, probably 20 years ago. My memory for names is very poor, but this time I put a 30-year older face together and exclaimed, 'Bert Johnson, APO, American University!'" Dennis concludes, "He was a very nice guy who could be counted on for any job over the whole 50 years."

The last time I saw Bert was in October 2018 when I was giving a presentation on my book on Aegean maps for the Washington Map Society at the Library of Congress. Despite having to lug around a huge oxygen cylinder, Bert loyally showed up for the event. He was unhappy to be unable to attend the 2019 ICHC in Amsterdam and quizzed me thoroughly about everything that happened and everyone I saw. His sudden hospitalization in late August 2019 prevented him from compiling a record of WMS attendees' evaluations and remarks about ICHC 2019; these summaries, which he wrote for the 2003 through 2017 conferences, proved so useful for future conference organizers. Shortly afterwards I heard that he was in rehabilitation at a local center for his breathing problems. His wife of 51 years, Mary Lee, was in the same facility, but in the nursing home section. They were disappointed not to be roommates, and when I talked to him on the phone, he said it was a challenge for him to get down to see her. He was devoted to her, and our sympathies go out to her.

—WMS member *Evelyn Edson* is Professor Emerita of History at Piedmont Virginia Community College in Charlottesville Virginia. She is the author of *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World* and *The World Map, 1300–1492: The Persistence of Tradition and Transformation*. Dr. Edson served from 2011–2019 as the Chair of the WMS Ristow Prize Competition. 