

35th Anniversary – Washington Map Society The Beginning—A Look Back

By William A. Stanley

On May 2, 1979, seventeen individuals with interests in historical cartography, map making, map collecting and related subjects met at the Geography and Map Division (GMD) of the Library of Congress at the invitation of Dr. Jonathan T. Lanman; a physician living in Bethesda, Maryland and Dr. Walter W. Ristow, then head of the GMD. They were brought together to discuss the creation of a local map society. The meeting was held in a warehouse on the outskirts of Alexandria, Virginia, the then-headquarters of the GMD. In April of that same year, Dr. Lanman sent a letter to some forty-nine individuals suggesting they meet at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 2nd to consider the feasibility of organizing a “Washington Map Society”. That warm evening the seventeen persons arrived at 845 South Pickett Street. A number of those attending the meeting were representing Federal mapping organizations that included the National Archives, Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress and the Coast & Geodetic Survey. In his letter Dr. Lanman suggested persons bring their spouses, and a number of them did. The meeting was opened by Dr. Lanman who then introduced Dr. Ristow. It seemed appropriate that Dr. Ristow begin by welcoming all to his Division and to brief the group on the collections of the GMD. He then indicated that if the group agreed, we should then set tentative dates for future meetings, nominate officers and set dues. By a unanimous vote, Dr. Ristow was elected to be the President, Ralph Ehrenberg, as Vice President and Dr. Lanman the Secretary-Treasurer. Dr. Ristow then suggested that each of the Federal mapping organizations take a turn in hosting future meetings. Dues for the Society were established at \$ 22 a year.

THE FIRST MEMBER MEETINGS

The first formal meeting of the new society was held on October 11, 1979. The speaker was Jose Miguel Barros, the Chilean Ambassador, and one of the seventeen Charter Members of the Society. The meeting was at the GMD. The Ambassador’s talk was “Map of Fray Gregorio de Leon and the Identity of Poncho Chileno: Two Enigmas of Chilean Cartography”. The next meeting was on December 4, 1979

hosted by the National Archives, Center for Cartographic and Architectural Archives. Dr. Ronald Grim and staff conducted the tour and discussion. The first meeting held in 1980 was hosted by Dr. Deborah Warner, Curator, History of Astronomy, National Museum of History & Technology, Smithsonian. The first full year of the Society brought on a strong program response. On April 8, 1980, Dr. Lanman made a presentation at the GMD. His topic was “The Seaway to Japan—A History in Maps”. Following Dr. Lanman’s discussion, in June the GMD hosted the group at their new headquarters in the James Madison Building on Capitol Hill. Dr. John Wolter, the Assistant Chief of the Division, led the tour and the presentation, which included Peter Walters, a Restoration Officer with the Library’s Preservation Office. The fall of 1980 brought Helen Wallis, Map Librarian, British Library to the GMD. Her presentation was on “Services and Collections of the British Library”. The last meeting of the year on December 9th saw the group at the Riverdale, Maryland offices of the National Ocean Survey’s Map Library. The tour was led by William Stanley and staff and included a demonstration of their 19th century copperplate printing press and a tour of their map collections.

As the years passed, other memorable meetings included in January 1982, Wilcomb Washburn’s presentation, “In Frobish’s Wake: All that Glittereth is not Gold”. Mr. Washburn was the Director, Office of American Studies, Smithsonian Institution.

In February 1983 the first field trip outside the D.C. area took place. Some 26 members visited the home of H. Russell Morrison, Rock Hall, Maryland on the Eastern Shore to view his impressive map collection of the Chesapeake Bay. During the ensuing years, other tours included the National Geographic Society, the Mariners Museum Library and Archives, Williamsburg, VA, and the first joint tour in 1987 with the New York and Delaware Valley Map Societies held in Gettysburg, PA. September’s meeting of that year was hosted by GMD’s Dr. John Wolter, the new head of the Division whose presentation was “Early Nineteenth Century Charting of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River”.

Numerous other memorable speakers and tours have followed over the years. I could not end this brief overview of our Society without mentioning Eleanor Abbey. Mrs. Abbey is one of the Charter Members and, to date; our most senior member. Eleanor was at the organizing meeting in 1979. At that meeting Dr. Ristow suggested that some form of refreshments be served when Federal agencies hosted a meeting. Mrs. Abbey approached Dr. Ristow and said she would like to take on the coordinating task. He quickly accepted her offer.

Much has taken place with our Society from its humble beginnings of seventeen members to our membership today of nearly four-hundred and our internationally recognized publication, *The Portolan*. To date, some thirty members have held the office of President. In the years ahead, we will see even greater progress as we mark this year's 35th Anniversary.

—William (Bill) Stanley is Past President and charter member of the WMS, retired Chief Historian, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and owner, Cartographic Associates, an antique map and print dealer, Frederick, Maryland.



Figure 1. Ralph Ehrenberg, Walter Ristow, John Hébert (at 25th Anniversary in 2004).



Figure 3. Eleanor Abbey (2005).



Figure 2. Tom Sander, John Wolter and Bill Stanley (2013).

35th Anniversary, Washington Map Society

Part II—The Middle Years

By William A. Stanley

The spring of 1985 saw the Washington Map Society (WMS) hold its first annual dinner on May 8th at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, Virginia. Records are unclear how many attended the event but it marked the beginning of an annual tradition that continues today. As the organization moved forward, through the 1980's and on into the 1990's, great strides were made in the program development and activities coupled with increased interest in the Society by the national cartographic community. An interest international map organizations would soon recognize as well.

As the organization developed, so did its governing body of directors. On April 5, 1989 the Society celebrated ten years as an organization. Then President Ralph Ehrenberg and Vice President, Harold Aber, Jr., orchestrated a wonderful anniversary event at the Key Bridge Marriott in Rosslyn, Virginia. At about the same time President Ehrenberg submitted a list of candidates for the next year's board. The nominating committee, headed by Ronald Grim, recommended that Nancy Miller become the next president of the Society and James Flatness as the next vice president and program chair. The other two officer positions of the board would be filled by John Snyder as secretary, and Michael Hirsch as treasurer; in addition to the eight elected board of directors.

In January of that same year the Society's monthly meeting was a field trip to the original Naval Observatory in Foggy Bottom. Jan Herman, the historian of the Navy Medical Department and curator of the old observatory building gave the group a visual presentation of how the U. S. Naval Observatory was first established noting "the Hill" was six feet higher than any other location in Georgetown. Monthly meetings of the society, as a rule, were held in the Reading Room of the Geography & Map Division of the Library of Congress. A sad note closed out the 1980's with the passing of Dr. Jonathan Lanman February 23, 1988. Dr. Lanman was one of the two co-founders of the WMS and was acknowledged by Dr. Walter Ristow, the other co-founder, in remarks given at the Georgetown Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.

DECADE OF THE 1990'S

International attention was slowly drawn to the Society; in October, 1990, the WMS assisted with the Eighth



Past presidents at 25th Anniversary – 2004.

Annual International Symposium of the International Map Collector's Society (IMCoS), held at the Library of Congress. The theme of the Symposium was "Mapping America". This event included papers presented by John Wolter, Richard Stephenson, Helen Wallis, Pearce Grove, and Kenneth Nebenzahl. The banquet speaker for the IMCoS Conference was Brian Harley. On May 15 of that same year the annual society dinner was held at the Ft. McNair Officers Club, Washington, D.C. where outgoing president Nancy Miller, gave an address on "*The Biggest Map Collector; How the Federal Government Decides which Maps to Keep*".



A meeting at the Library of Congress.

Under the stewardship of the new incoming Board of Directors, President James Flatness and John Fondersmith, Vice President and program chair, presented the fall 1990 program that included a field trip to the Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons Island, Maryland. Aiding in the planning of the museum's primary exhibition "Charting the Chesapeake, 1590–1990", were Russell Morrison, Robert Hansen and Edward Papenfuse. Dr. Ronald Grim, who at that time was the Head of the Reference and Bibliography Section of the Geography and Map Division, also assisted in the planning which included a number of Federal agencies among them the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History and the National Ocean Service, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration. The society also arranged for a cruise up the Patuxent River on the Museum's oyster boat the WM. B. TENNISON, marking a first for WMS field trips.



Dinner at U.S. Capitol – 2006.

During the 1990s, it became customary for the outgoing presidents to give an address on their map collecting and cartographic interests. Many interesting and enlightening presentations were made in the 1980's including those given by Eric Wolf (1982), Richard Stephenson (1983), Robert Highbarger (1984), Janet Green (1985), Charles Burroughs (1986), Ronald Grim (1987), and John Garver (1988). Many other outgoing presidents during the 1990s and beyond also gave interesting and creative presentations at the annual dinners.

As the decade of the 1980's passed into history, the decade of the 1990's saw many other milestones in the Society's development. In August of 1991, the Society was incorporated as a non-profit organization in the District of Columbia and soon thereafter received 501(c)(3) status as a charitable non-profit organization. The *Ristow Prize* honoring Dr. Walter Ristow was created in 1993 under the thoughtful direction of Nancy Miller, with the first award made in 1994 to John Hamer, a graduate student of the University of Michigan whose paper, "World Apart: Norman Mappaemundi in England and Sicily" would be published in *The Portolan* as would all future winners. Each winner would receive a \$ 1,000 scholarship and a year's membership in the Society. The WMS was the first map society to have a website established. Created by John Docktor in 1996 (president 1996–97). It was now possible to reach a national and international audience with information about monthly meetings and special events.

In 1997, the WMS had reached a point where its membership roles needed to be better focused. Bert Johnson, president of the Society (1997–98), introduced the idea of a board committee that would focus on membership. Thus, a new committee was formed and chaired by Bert Johnson to develop a membership database. These changes provided a better means of membership retention which at that point, had some 350 individuals and organizations on the rolls. That data base was, and still is, maintained by John Docktor.

THE NEW CENTURY

The journal of the WMS, *The Portolan* had moved forward from its earlier editors: Dr. Lanman, Charles Burroughs (president 1985–86), and Jeanne Young (Charter Member), to a new editor—Thomas Sander. Beginning with the spring issue in 1997 and under his editorial leadership, the publication moved into a new era, recognized internationally as a leading cartographic journal of the United States. U.S. and international institutions began ordering back issues of *The Portolan* for their libraries on an ever increasing basis. International and institutional membership continues to grow.

As we began the 21st century the Society celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 2004. Ralph Ehrenberg, in his second term as president, ensured an impressive program to be held in Washington, D.C., under the direction of this author and a steering committee comprised of nine past presidents, and other senior members of the organization. A program that included a diverse array of speakers such as Anne Kelly Knowles, Professor, Middlebury College, Vermont who spoke on GIS as a mapping tool for the Battle of Gettysburg; Chris Lane, co-owner of the Philadelphia Print Shop, with his work on the PBS's *Antiques Roadshow*, and Charter society member and past president Richard Stephenson's paper on Mapping the Nation's Capital from the Civil War to the 20th century. The two day event concluded with a dinner at the World Bank, Washington, D.C. with 128 persons attending.

One of the most impressive annual dinners held thus far by the WMS was at the U. S. Capitol on May 26, 2006, where some 80 persons attended a sit-down meal in the Mike Mansfield Room. A military color guard opened the evening followed by the singing of the National Anthem by Fernando Valdivia, a music teacher from Reston, Virginia. There were two presenters, the first was Richard Stephenson who spoke of his memories of the Library of Congress map hall from the time he was a young boy visiting the office of his father. His father at the time was the Curator of the Library Station in Statuary Hall. His address was followed by Dr. Matthew Evans, Landscape Architect of the Capitol.

In 2012 the responsibilities of the WMS website transitioned from John Docktor to Leigh Lockwood who has continued the efforts and improved the sites available information. A secured section of the site "members only" allows persons to enter informative data about themselves and share that, if they wish, with other WMS members.

END OF AN ERA

On April 3, 2006 we lost our other founder, Dr. Walter W. Ristow, who along with Dr. Lanman was the driving force behind the creation of the WMS. Wally, as he was known, passed away only a few days before his 98th birthday. He inspired those that knew him by his firm dedication to the high value he placed on historical cartography and his efforts to instill, in the generations to come of young geographers and cartographers, the key role that mapping has played and will continue to play on the world stage of human development.

—Bill Stanley is past president of the Washington Map Society. His first article about the WMS's 35 Anniversary appeared in this journal's Spring 2014 issue (#89), and his third and final article will appear in the Winter 2014 issue (#91).



Field trip to National Park Service – 2002.



25th Anniversary Cake – 2004.

35th Anniversary, Washington Map Society

Part III – A Look Forward

by William A. Stanley

We have reviewed, over the past several issues of *The Portolan*, where we have been as an organization. We began in 1979, then the years of the 1980's and 1990's and 2000's with special programs and memorable events. We now look to the future to determine how we can best maintain our goals and what needs to be accomplished. Sustained development is of paramount importance to the Washington Map Society (WMS). What we have already achieved today, with many noted successes, will be reviewed. In this article we will look at those achievements, the organizational structure, and carefully look at how the accomplishments have benefitted our progress. We will note too what still needs to be done. We will review the overall amenities of the WMS and expand on the opportunities that can be offered to insure continued success of what has already been demonstrated: the expanded website, increased involvement in the social media experience, and even greater strides with our internationally recognized journal, *The Portolan*.

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Member interest in the Internet sparked excitement which lead John Docktor in 1996 to create the WMS website. His medical practice and an annual gathering with other physicians in York, Pennsylvania gave him the idea of what he called "an on-call" calendar for upcoming events. The early years of the WMS website spawned the creation of a database as an outgrowth of the creation of the Membership Committee and its mandate to expand and better serve the membership. Our website is today both professionally managed and a key source for information to our members on a wide variety of subjects, including a password-protected members-only entry key which contains the constantly updated membership directory; non-members can benefit from a multitude of information that has been placed at the website in the public areas. The past several years have seen website activity greatly expanded under the skillful management of our new webmaster, Leigh Lockwood. Leigh has expanded the site's data source elements and future additions are in the works. This effort coupled with John Docktor's separately-maintained and internationally-recognized *Calendar of Events* have given the WMS a strong exposure to a much wider pool of Internet users providing knowledgeable information on coming cartographic events and WMS publications and activities.



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Map
Society**

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- Map Collectors
- Cartographers
- Map Historians
- Map Enthusiasts
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MEMBERSHIP

A key element to any organization is the development of its membership base both in acquiring new members and the retention of present members. The efforts of Hubert (Bert) Johnson over the years established criteria for a member database. As the Chair of the Membership Committee in the late 1990's, Bert formulated several actions that led to a complete review and digitization of our member records. This action by him and others gave a new and enhanced understanding of the membership. It also gave members the opportunity to become more involved. Our members were solicited for information about themselves in order to better gauge who our members are, their interests, and other data that gave the Society the tools it needed to develop program agendas and website data and the fiscal aspects required by the Board of Directors in formulating budgets. Through our website and within the "members only" section, members can access information about other members and share their interests. As mentioned earlier, the members-only section is password-protected and only with the permission of the individual member can others view their input. This feature of the database also allows WMS officers to identify persons interested in supporting such subjects as the book reviews of *The Portolan*, as well as shared knowledge of historical maps. The function has improved our communication with all members. The Membership Database is and will continue to be a significant part of the management of the WMS. Our new Membership Chair Eliane Dotson brings to the Board of Directors new energy and ideas on strengthening the goals and objectives of the Society. Future programs, social media opportunities, and membership retention are key factors in the growth of the society.

FACEBOOK

The Facebook phenomena has become a "social layer" of the Internet; several years ago the WMS embraced the idea by establishing a Facebook presence for society members and also non-members interested in current information on the history of cartography. This part of our outreach is still developing and continues to be a key element in the organization's growth. Under the management of WMS member Richard Moore, there is an emerging connection between the Facebook site and its viewers, including WMS members. The continued exposure through Facebook will provide the WMS a forum to enable members to link to others and improve the society's communication development.



THE PORTOLAN

Of all the organizational elements of the WMS, none is more important nor has brought more attention to the Society than *The Portolan*. As previously mentioned in this three-part review of the WMS, the journal began simply as a newsletter for upcoming meetings and other related information to members. Today, the journal is an international publication recognized as a source and vehicle for historical cartography research to the world's antiquarian mapping community. While there have been a number of editors over the years, success of the current journal is the singular result of Tom Sander, its editor since 1997. His commitment and editorial skills have produced one of the leading journals world-wide for information and scholarly data on historical cartography. Without reservation, *The Portolan* is a coveted resource to academia. Libraries around the globe have sought back issues of the journal and maintain current subscriptions in order to receive the publication. The future of the journal and its continued high quality of intellectual contributions as well as relevant news, will insure the WMS role in national and international cartographic circles. If there is one concern I would have, it is the WMS need to further support the editor in his capacity as the single focus for the continued success of the journal. The question begs, what more can the WMS do to insure the future years of the journal? While other cartographic publications have faded away, I see *The Portolan* with a bright future and continued growth both through the diversity of the subject matter and continued advertising, which includes both national and international dealers and societies.



Dr. Walter W. Ristow

THE RISTOW PRIZE

Founded in 1994 the Ristow Prize named for the late Dr. Walter W. Ristow, recognizes academic achievement in the field of historical cartography. The award each year includes a \$1000 cash prize and publication of the winning paper in *The Portolan*.

The Ristow Prize is yet another form of recognition for the WMS. Since its inception from an endowment by Ms. Jeanne Young, the award has drawn the attention of undergraduates and graduate students in the field of historical geography and cartography. The future of the prize will continue to be a vehicle for bringing young people into the society. This blend of academic performance and youthful involvement will insure a continuance of the prospect for new members and to expand the WMS into campus life with colleges and universities throughout the United States and abroad. The current chair of the Ristow Prize is Evelyn Edson whose academics provide for professional management of the Prize.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the present organization and involvement of the Washington Map Society in the many facets of geographic and cartographic life. With the continued assurance of supporting members and friends the Society will continue in the decades to come, providing a focus for persons in all walks of life who share a common interest in the history of mapping and the future of cartography.

—Bill Stanley is past president of the Washington Map Society. His first two articles about the WMS's 35 Anniversary appeared in this journal's Spring and Fall 2014 issues (#89 & 90). Information contained in this article was provided to the author by the past Presidents of the WMS whose passion for antiquarian mapping and service to the WMS is appreciated by all.

