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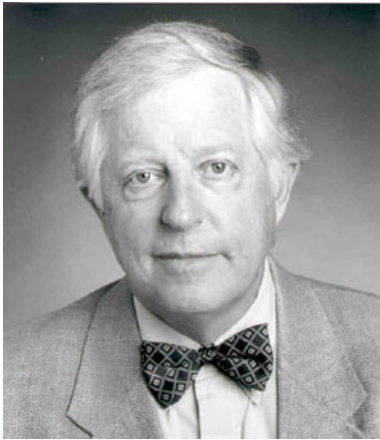
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**William V. Davidson**  
**Recipient of 2001 Preston E. James Eminent Career Award**

*Kent Mathewson*

It is indeed a pleasure and an honor to present CLAG's 2001 Preston E. James Eminent Career Award to William V. Davidson. Bill Davidson is a professor of Geography, and Chair of the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University. A native Arkansan with deep Delta roots, Davidson joined the department



in 1975. His master's thesis was on the Maya settlement patterns of Isla Cozumel, and his PhD dissertation recounted the historical geography of Anglo-Hispanic conflict in and around the Bay Islands, Honduras. He came with skills and interests directed at cultural and historical questions and reconstructions along Central America's Caribbean Coast. He has honed and extended them over the past 25 years. He has also moved inland at various points, particularly in Honduras.

Before moving to these details, I'd like to note in passing, the passing, of Robert C. West. Dr. West died May 14<sup>th</sup> -- one month ago today. West came to LSU in 1948, some 25 years before Davidson arrived. West remained very active, save for the last three years. Their time overlap was more than matched by their complementarities. Most of the hallmarks of LSU's Latin Americanist tradition -- coastal & lowland contexts, material culture and landscape topics, focus on indigenous and non-dominant ethnic groups, from cultural and historical, or biophysical perspectives, were put in place by West. Davidson, through his own ample contributions, and those of his students, has raised the relief, extended the scope, and made it an ongoing concern. This enterprise has set the tone for, and produced, much of the geographic research on Honduras over the past two decades.

Permit me one more detour, before turning to Davidson's career. Those new to CLAG may not know much about our awards, and who has received them in the past. And even our veteran members may not remember all the details. Bill Davidson will be the thirteenth geographer to receive this award. The first CLAG award went to Preston James in 1977 for "Outstanding Contributions in Teaching, Research, and Service." Subsequently, six other CLAG members, including Robert West, received the same award. In 1986 this award was split into two separate categories: the Eminent Career Award, and the Distinguished Scholarship Award. In 1989 these awards were renamed --the Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award, and the Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award. The James award honors the triad of achievements -- research, service, and teaching -- in equal measure.

The first James award went to Dan Stanislawski, a cultural-historical geographer with boots in both Iberia and the New World, nicely reflecting the

theme of this conference. The subsequent recipients have been: Clarence Minkel 1990; David Robinson 1991; Angel Bassols Batalla 1992; Daniel Gade 1993; Josh Dickenson 1994; César Caviedes 1995; Gerhard Sandner 1997; Clarissa Kimber 1998; Carl Johannessen 1998; David Preston 1999; and Bernard Nietschmann 2000. This group includes some of our foremost Central Americanists: Dickenson, Sandner, Johannessen, and Nietschmann. Each is known for their unique and notable contributions. So is Davidson, but perhaps what is most outstanding about his career, is the equipoise with which he puts effective research, teaching, and service on equally high planes. A superb natural athlete, he must draw on some of this grace for his abilities to produce good solid research, teach legions of both undergraduates and graduates about Latin America with a legendary lecture style, and quietly serve on a crushing array of committees and other obligations at the university, national, and international levels. And with such a sunny disposition! A fuller accounting, of course, will appear in the published version of these remarks. Here, I have time to only skim the surface. Let me give you then a quick "roster" of Davidson's contributions and accomplishments. The publications include his book on the Bay Islands, several edited volumes, and some sixty other articles, book chapters, and reviews primarily dealing with the historical geography of ethnic minorities in Central America. While a popular and effective teacher in the classroom, it is in taking students to the field, where his talents are really on record. Davidson is one of our most seasoned pros. Since 1975 he has led some 28 student trips to Latin America, more than one a year. He has served as major professor for 36 LSU graduate students. This has led to ten doctoral dissertations and 21 master's thesis on Latin American topics. While I can't recount their titles, I will mention some of the topics. Peter Herlihy's indigenous geographies in Panama and Honduras stand out. Rick Samson's Pech work and Elizabeth Fraser's Ladino study follow his Honduran leads. Peter Galvin's pirate geographies, Scott Brady's colonial roads, Taylor Mack's Trujillo study, and Craig Revel's mahogany work are (or will be) valued contributions in Honduran historical geography. Terri Mitchell's Protestants and Ben Tillman's Moravians add to cultural geographic work on religious landscapes in Honduras. His Master's theses cover an even greater collection of cultural geographic topics. They include: salt making in Nicoya and charcoal making in Mexico, guavas in Colombia and coconuts in Honduras, gathered plants in Jalisco and kitchen gardens in Nicaragua, causeways in the Petén and folk houses in Belize and also Honduras, Confederates and Mennonites in Belize, and Jews in Suriname. As you can see, themes involving material culture and ethnogeography loom large. His many services performed on behalf of Latin Americanist geography include: U.S. alternative delegate to the O.A.S. Pan American Institute of Geography and History; geography editor of the U.S. Library of Congress' *Handbook of Latin American Studies*; Fulbright scholar and long-standing reviewer of Fulbright and Title VI programs involving Latin America; consultant for various projects in Central America. In 1998 he was elected honorary member of the Honduran Academy of Geography and History, the only non-national so honored.

His service to CLAG has been equally meritorious. He has been a board member twice, and oversaw the yearbook production when it was published at LSU in the 1980s. Perhaps most impressive, he has organized not one, but *two*, of CLAG's best meetings – at Mérida, Yucatán in 1987, and Tegucigalpa in 1996. Nobody can run a more cost-effective meeting than Bill Davidson. If we could only secure his services as permanent director of CLAG's conference bureau, we could probably afford to double the frequency of our gatherings. I could go on in this vein for much more time than I have here. I am delighted, that despite other commitments, Bill and his wonderful wife Sharon, were able to make the trip.

In closing, I would like to return to the collective identity of the previous Preston James Award winners. Remember, the group includes: Stanislawski,

Robinson, Bassols Batalla, Gade, Dickenson, Caviedes, Sandner, Kimber, Johannessen, Preston, and Nietschmann. As a group, they share various things – not only their multiple accomplishments, but save lamentably for the first and the last, they also demonstrate an ongoing engagement with Latin Americanist geography. As it has evolved, this award does not *have* to be seen as a capstone event. Just look at David Robinson over there – ten years later, and still accelerating! So don Guillermo, soon freed from your administrative and formal teaching duties, we hope that this award gives you – doña Sharon willing – all the more license to do, what we all know you love best, and that is getting down with people, and getting dirty in all sorts of places – from Roatán to Ocotepaque; from El Triunfo to Cabo Gracias a Dios.

Y gracias a gaia – la diosa de la tierra – that you left Law School to become a cultural-historical geographer. You have been at it now for thirty-five committed years. Ojalá que no nos abandones en tu jubilación y que nos proporciones varias décadas más!