

Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award



Alfred H. Siemens

The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award goes to Alfred H. Siemens, Professor of Geography at the University of British Columbia. I served on Professor Siemens' Ph.D. committee at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1964 and have closely followed his productive career since then, so I am particularly pleased to present this award to him.

The Sauer Award is for an outstanding publication or publications in recent years, and that criteria is met by Professor Siemens' book *Between the Summit and the Sea: Central Veracruz in the Nineteenth Century*, published by the University of British Columbia Press. This is an historical geography utilizing traveler's accounts, based on research in Mexico, Germany, the United States, and Canada, and grounded in a lifetime of field work in Veracruz. The book has been described by George Lovell as follows:

... a fine example of what a mature geographer, one writing in his intellectual prime, can produce. What we have before us, in range and imaginativeness, is a piece of work the author clearly enjoyed undertaking, an illustration of something geography is eminently capable of producing ... an especially innovative example of good geography, one that is alive, animated, and breathes with the wonder of curiosity and discovery.

Professor Siemens began his research in southern Veracruz with his doctoral dissertation on agricultural colonization. However, his interests shifted dramatically in 1968 when, while flying over a new settlement zone along the Río Candelaria in southwestern Campeche, he spotted what appeared to be raised fields similar to those reported a few years earlier in South America. A research project with archaeologist Dennis Puleston indicated that the features were of Classic Maya origin, the first confirmation that Maya civilization was not supported entirely by shifting cultivation. This led to further discoveries and research on wetland fields by Siemens in Belize and then in Veracruz. followed by numerous publications [end p. 116] that were a major contribution to the demise of the "myth of the milpa" in tropical Mexico. This work is brought together in his 1989 book, *Tierra configurada: Investigaciones de los vestigios de agricultura precolombina en tierras inundables costeras desde el norte de Veracruz hasta Belice*, published in Mexico City.

Professor Siemens' first book was *The Americas: A Comparative Introduction to Geography* (Duxbury Press, 1977). It is a truly innovative textbook that compares Latin America with North America: São Paulo with Chicago, the central valleys of Chile and California, the Pampa with the Great Plains, Northeast Brazil with Appalachia, and the Amazon with the Arctic. It is well worth an examination by those of us teaching courses on Latin America

Thus, Alfred Siemens has had a variety of interests in Latin America, but Veracruz has been a continuing focus for some thirty years. He has great knowledge of and affection for that tropical land and people. We give the Sauer Award to him particularly for his magnificent historical geography of Veracruz, but also for his ground breaking research on prehistoric agriculture. Carl Sauer would have approved.

William M. Denevan [end p. 117]