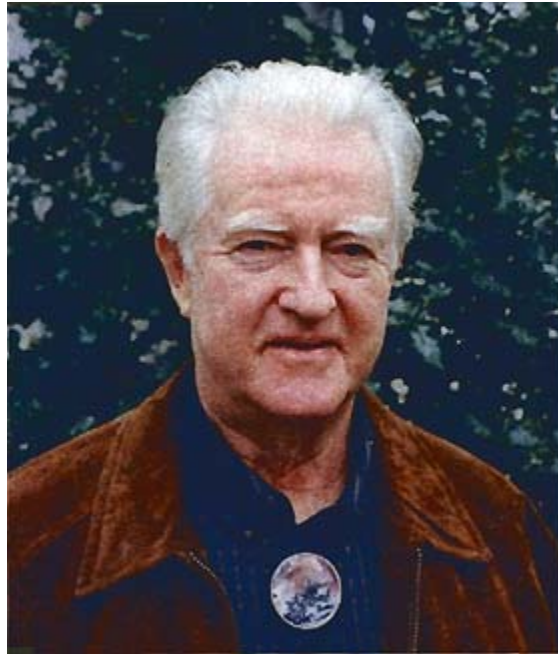


The 1998 Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award



The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers honors the profession of geography by recognizing **Carl L. Johannessen** and his work with the Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award.

Carl's career is a classic example of the hybrid vigor that derives from early training in a specialized discipline, in his case the biological sciences, capped with a Ph. D. in geography. That his mentor, Carl O. Sauer, attracted such crossovers has been a boon to our profession. Out of his doctoral research leading to a Ph.D. from Berkeley in 1959 came *Savannas of Interior Honduras* (1963) in the Prestigious Ibero-Americana series. The blending of scientific training in biology with the cultural and historical perspectives of geography reflected in his doctoral work, presaged a rich and wide-ranging array of research themes and publications during Carl's long and continuing career as a field geographer. Perhaps one of the better measures of a scholar's stature in the sciences are the sources of his or her funding. Carl's work over the years has been supported by a Guggenheim Fellowship, The National Science Foundation, The Carnegie Foundation, The National Geographic Foundation, The Office of Naval Research and the Agricultural Development Council.

To say Carl exhibits the tenacity of a bulldog is far too mild a metaphor to describe the all-consuming persistence with which he approaches research - be it on the *pejibaye* palm, black-boned chickens, wave-cut terraces or early maize in the Old World. Should his research challenge conventional wisdom, particularly related to the exchange of domesticates between the Old and New Worlds before 1492, his tenacity redoubles. His dedication to research should be an inspiration to students and humbling to many of the rest of us. When NSF or the National Geographic Foundation funding is delayed, Carl is off to the field at his own expense; when grant funding doesn't cover a vehicle, he is off on the next rickety bus.

Carl is not always content to study, write and publish. Work on the plant domestication processes have ranged from observation and exhaustive interviews in the field in the farthest comers of Maya country, germplasm reproduction in University of Oregon greenhouses, to tissue culture in his own laboratory. He is ever alert for the practical application of even the most seemingly esoteric research, whether to improve the

food security of the small farmer or as a potential commercial venture. [end p. 101]

In the Northeast of Brazil, he worked with the OAS to design Centers for Innovation and Domestication drawing on his extensive research on the ancient process of domestication. When researching the geographic distribution and domestication of the pejibaye palm, Carl, "El Pejibayero", immersed himself in the process of selecting for high vitamin A content and spinelessness to improve the commercial potential of this palm of the wet tropics. Not content with seed selection for desirable characteristics, Carl devoted great efforts to vegetatively reproduce the pejibaye. Not content with the pejibaye, cucurbit, amaranth and maize, Carl works with equal enthusiasm on filberts, apples and pears on his own farm.

Of the ideas about pre-Columbian exchanges between the Old and New worlds sown among his students by Carl Sauer, perhaps none took deeper root as the focus of the intense intellectual curiosity of Carl Johannessen than the melanotic chicken. A casual encounter with a melanotic chicken (black boned - black meated chicken or BB-BMC) in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala in 1973 triggered an odyssey through Mexico, Guatemala and Belize in Mesoamerica, on to Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile in South America and thence across the Pacific to Easter Island, Hawaii, Samoa and Tahiti. This effort was funded by the National Geographic Foundation. The methodology followed throughout called for first the direct observation of BB-BMCs in the barnyard, discussion of the problems of hybridizing with commercially raised breeds followed by open-ended interviews in which respondents were asked to describe the medicinal uses of the chickens. The uses were most complex and similar among the Mesoamerican Maya peoples although some uses were documented throughout South America, particularly among the Mapuches in Chile. Seeking Old World links Carl engaged May Fogg, the Chinese speaking wife of one of his graduate students, to explore the ancient and modern Chinese literature. This led to the discovery of a treasure trove of similar uses of the BB-BMC in southern China, not to mention among the Chinese community in the Americas. This saga is illustrative of Carl's ingenuity in building a case for early cultural exchange based on field mapping of distribution coupled with interviews to document uses and linguistic cues, thorough exploration of original sources, and carefully reasoned and documented presentation. There are few Latin Americanists among us who came of age in geography during Carl's pursuit of the BB-BMC in the 1970s who weren't infected by his enthusiasm. To this day none of us can walk through a barnyard or market in the back country of Latin America without casting a furtive eye among the chickens and asking discreet questions.

An abiding interest of Carl's has been understanding of plant domestication in the past through study of present processes of selection and reproduction by isolated groups. The first evidence of this interest was a piece on "Man's Role in the Distribution of the Corozo Palm" in 1957. The conceptual underpinnings of are well stated in his 1987 "Domestication Process: An Hypothesis for its Origin" chapter in *Carl O. Sauer: A Tribute* (OSU Press, Corvallis). Around 1985 Carl embarked on another epic quest - the documentation of the presence of maize in the Old World prior to 1492. His NSF-funded work in India and beyond in Nepal and China is a tribute to this Latin Americanist's imagination, perseverance and pure grit. His photographs of 12th and 13th Century sculptures showing maize ears in the hands of buxom maidens offer a most convincing entree to Carl's exhaustive analysis of sculpted maize ear morphology, linguistic connections, ancient and modern literature review, and field studies of maize growing in isolated valleys of the Himalayas.

Both the poet Gabriela Mistral and the writer Ernest Hemingway recognized the special power that the verb *servir*, to serve, has in the Spanish language. It is in the transcendent meaning of this word that we in CLAG have the honor to acknowledge that Carl L. Johannessen has served and served well. He has served as Chair of his Department and of CLAG; he has served the dozens of students who took degrees under his direction as well as thousands he taught, he has served the advancement of science, he has served humanity through his plant breeding; his selection of better pejibayes, and through his probing questions, envelope-stretching ideas and warm friendship, he has served us all.

