

## GEOGRAPHICAL RECORD

### AUDUBON TERRACE, THE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, AND THE SENSE OF PLACE\*

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John Kirtland Wright, in his centennial history of the American Geographical Society (AGS), *Geography in the Making: The American Geographical Society, 1851–1951* (1952), described geography as a highly diverse discipline, eclectic in focus and scope. Wright was the librarian of the AGS from 1920 until he became director in 1938, a position he held until 1949. He was also elected president of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) in 1946. His presidential address was highly original, an intellectual tour de force that opened the door of the discipline to its humanistic roots. The address, “Terrae Incognitae: The Place of Imagination in Geography,” was in many ways far ahead of its time, and it laid a foundation for intellectual inquiry in the discipline for years to come (Wright 1947; Lowenthal and Bowden 1976).

Two decades later David Lowenthal, research associate in cultural geography at the AGS, along with Yi-Fu Tuan, a geographer at the University of Minnesota, developed further a humanistic geographical focus in the discipline. While at the AGS, Lowenthal integrated environmental perception, environmental history, and cultural landscape in studies of the meaning of place (Lowenthal 1961). Contemporary geographical scholarship—the discipline in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century—is rich in such research, whereas academic geography from the 1950s through the 1970s was often too caught up in the positivist mode of analysis to consider seriously humanistic approaches and qualitative rather than quantitative methodology. Nonetheless, even as the “behavioristic spatial science” of the time held forth as the discipline searched for its “scientific” core, a “new geography,” with roots in the cultural, historical, behavioral, and humanistic approaches of Wright and Lowenthal, emerged (Johnston 1991, 161–162). Place—and the human capacity to imagine and create a sense of place—began to emanate from the AGS’s Audubon

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\* The material in this note was initially presented during a panel discussion at the Centennial Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, held in Philadelphia in March 2003. I wish to thank Mary Lynne Bird, executive director of the American Geographical Society, for inviting me to offer my personal reminiscences of my days at the AGS during the mid-1960s. I also wish to thank my fellow panelists for their insights (Hart 2004). My memories of life at Audubon Terrace have benefited particularly from comments by other former AGS employees whom I count as friends as well as colleagues: Miklos Pinther, David Lowenthal, Mary Alice Lamberty Lowenthal, Lynn Mullins, Michael Woldenberg, Charles Morrison, and Robert Dickson. I also wish to acknowledge Dorothy Weitz Drummond, who wrote about her recollections of working at the AGS during the early 1950s in *Ubique*, the Society’s newsletter (2001). Mary Flad remains my wonderful primary source for memories of 153rd Street and of Audubon Terrace.

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