



IN MEMORIAM

Morgan Bronson Sherwood
Professor of History, Emeritus
Davis
1929 — 2000

The needed and welcome strengths that Morgan Sherwood brought to our history department in 1965 were several. Well established are his histories of Alaska, and well remembered are his studies and teaching of American science and technology in their relation to environmental and general American history, his keen sense of the demarcation line between science and pseudo or sham science, and his dedication to helping edit *Agricultural History*. Added to these talents were a personality and independent mind that suited a department known for its merit and diverse pursuits. His colleagues were fortunate for 26 years to have in their midst this spry, twinkling-eyed, iconoclastic, and kind man with a sharp underground wit.

Morgan came to Alaskan history as a birthright. Anchorage born and graduate of its high school in 1947, he moved with his family thereafter to southern California but claimed, when interviewed the year before his death, "I never left home." He worked his way through San Diego State College to a bachelor's degree in 1953 by joining summer survey crews out in the Alaska bush. Following army service for three years in Korea and Germany, he entered the history department at Berkeley to take a master's degree in 1958 and his doctorate in 1962. There he came under the tutelage of Hunter Depree and wrote the dissertation that became his first book, *Exploration of Alaska, 1865-1900*. This study emphasizes the impact of technology in finding and opening new regions. It fits well with his mentor Depree's path marking book on science in the federal government, which in its turn followed themes initially put forward by Depree's professor at Harvard, Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. Thus goes thematic genealogy among historians. Morgan probed this subject further by joining Depree's research team in Washington, D.C. (1962-64). The sojourn resulted in his co-authoring a small volume in 1965, *The Politics of American Science*. But his enduring and happy experience there was meeting Jeanie Woods and then marrying her in 1963.

Although Morgan was comfortable in his first professorial appointment (1964-65) in the history department at the University of Cincinnati, the opportunity to return west into the burgeoning UC system was too attractive to refuse. In 1965 he joined our department as assistant professor to teach United States history and to help James Shideler edit the quarterly journal, *Agricultural History*. He later said this move was "the best decision" he ever made, characterizing the Davis department as "a wonderful place to work," and adding that "the most important thing about any academic job is collegiality." Under Shideler's hand in a few years the journal became one of the finest specialized historical journals, with a worldwide readership. Morgan recalled his close editing of journal copy as rewarding as was also "the great experience" of working with Jim – "a man who knew exactly what he wanted."

He meanwhile was occasionally teaching the American history survey course and initiating advanced instruction in the history of American science and technology, then an unusual field for course work. He liked to emphasize his lateral interest in sham science; he had a built-in detector for quackery – a favorite word was humbug. He thought Americans are now living in a "period of exaggerated public gullibility about fake science."

Through these years Morgan remained true to his first historical interest. He was gaining a reputation as Alaska's foremost historian. It won him an honorary degree from the University of Alaska. Not mentioning

shorter pieces or reviews, the procession of his books is striking. Following his first popular volume on exploration (published first by Yale University Press in 1965 and still in paperback from University of Alaska Press), he edited the large volume, *Alaska and Its History* (University of Washington Press, 1967). Next came his edition of essays, *The Cook Inlet Collection: Two Hundred Years of Selected Alaskan History* (Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1974); then his eminently readable *Big Game in Alaska, A History of Wildlife and People* (Yale University Press, 1981).

He and Jeanie certified their attachment to Alaska by building and keeping for three decades a cabin at Halibut Cove across the bay from Homer. There, Morgan had the summer hours to develop ways that would encourage people to read and write Alaskan history. Their home near Davis in Winters for two decades was on ten acres near Putah Creek, surrounded by walnut and orange trees. They drove daily to Davis, Jeanie to her job as secretary for 20 years in the physical education department. They moved to "the city" (Davis) in 1989.

Although "sourdough" is now seldom used for an Alaskan in the two- fold sense of prospector and old- timer, surely in Morgan Sherwood's case it is an apt metaphor. He was a prospector in the manifold stories of man and nature in his home territory while he was also an old- timer as a talented and shrewd chronicler. He indeed never left home. We were thankful and so well supported to have him in our company.

Wilson Smith
Arnold Bauer
David Brody