Gordon Winant Hewes (1917-1997)

Roger Wescott
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After 79 years of productive good health, anthropologist Gordon Hewes succumbed last November to a sudden barrage of ailments.

A native Californian, Hewes was a student at Berkeley of Alfred Louis Kroeber, the late "dean of American anthropologists." There he received his two university degrees — a B.A. with highest honors and a Ph.D. in anthropology.

Unlike most of his disciplinary colleagues, Hewes maintained an active life-long commitment to the anthropological ideal of holism promoted and exemplified by Kroeber. Both men were field-workers and researchers in each one of the four "quadrants" of anthropology: ethnology; archeology; primate biology; and linguistics.

Again like Kroeber, moreover, Hewes' interests overflowed the bounds of anthropology as a departmental entity. He worked effectively in the fields of geography, history, economics, sociology, and psychology.

Between 1937 and 1967, Hewes worked on archeological digs in 18 disparate locales. From 1962 to 1965 he served as Director of the Colorado Nubian Expedition, seeking to salvage Egyptian antiquities prior to the construction of the Aswan Dam.

His teaching career spanned the years 1939 to 1988. Beginning as a Teaching Assistant at the University of California, he became a full Professor and Acting Chairman of the Anthropology Department at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

From 1940 to 1996 his publications included three books and over 200 articles. Of these, the most popular was probably "The Anthropology of Posture," which appeared in The Scientific American (196: 122-132, 1957). On reading it, I wrote him a letter of appreciation, which initiated a correspondence between us that lasted nearly 40 years.

He was much in demand as a visiting scholar and visiting
lecturer between 1955 and 1985, speaking at institutions as diverse as Oxford University in England and the University of Kyoto in Japan. In 1978, he and his wife circumnavigated the globe aboard the S.S. Universe on behalf of the Institute for Shipboard Education. During this one-semester voyage, one of his instructional colleagues, a distinguished geographer, described him as "educating not only the enrolled students but the teaching staff as well."

Hewes enjoyed travel not merely as a means of scholarly contact but for its own sake, as a source of face-to-face information about the world's people and habitats. Between 1956 and 1984, the Heweses visited both ports and inland centers on every continent, including Australia and several of the islands of Oceania. Before or after nearly every international conference at which he spoke, they toured surrounding regions as widely as possible.

He was a member of 16 professional societies, of four of which he was an officer. He was elected a Fellow of both The American Anthropological Association and The Association of American Geographers. The organization in which he and I worked most closely together was the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, on whose Executive Committee he and I both served. Another association in whose development we shared a keen interest was the Language Origins Society, since he and I had previously co-edited a volume entitled Language Origins.

He was a polyglot at a time when most Americans, even in academia, are effectively unilingual. He read German, French, Spanish, Russian, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese and spoke all of them with varying degrees of proficiency. In Latin America he lectured in Spanish. And he knew American Sign Language.

Among the topics on which Hewes was a pioneer were: the connection between food-carrying and human bipedalism; the link between bipedalism and the use of hands for pointing; and the sequence of deictic behaviors leading to manual gesture-language. During the last three decades, he was the leading expo-
nent of "manualism" — the theory that language was manual-visual before it became vocal-auditory.

The project of which he was laboring most assiduously during the past decade was, in a sense, an extension of Kroeber's concept of the Oikumene (or ecumene) linking Europe through Central Asia to China. The project was a global history of the 7th century of the common era, including both hemispheres, considered by Hewes to be the least manageable century for such a world-wide survey. Despite this consideration, the survey has now stretched well beyond 10,000 pages. Anyone interested in furthering the project is urged to contact the Anthropology Department at the University of Colorado in Boulder!

Gordon is survived by his wife Minna Winestine Hewes of Boulder, who not only accompanied him on nearly all his travels but collaborated with him in the editing of conference proceedings.

Contributions in his honor may be made to Friends of Washoe, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington 98926; or to the Gorilla Foundation, P.O. Box 620-530, Woodside, California 94062.

Hewes was one of the few professors I have known who genuinely merits the overused title of "Renaissance Man." He was a generalist in the best and most ecumenical sense of that word. Many of his colleagues from a plurality of disciplines have often said (in effect), "If you can't find it in the encyclopedia, don't despair. Consult Gordon!"

Gordon Hewes will be greatly missed. In him, scholarship has lost a polymath. And I have lost both a congenial collaborator and a treasured friend.

Roger Williams Wescott