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IN MEMORIAM

William Michael Mathes

IRIS ENGSTRAND

Professor of History, University of San Diego



MICHAEL MATHES, WELL KNOWN AS AN award-winning historian and professor of history, was a many-faceted individual with a variety of talents that endeared him to legions of admirers. An expert in all things Mexican and a specialist in the history of Baja California, Mike was truly bicultural and flawlessly bilingual. Those who interacted with him, even slightly, never forgot his willingness to help, his valuable suggestions, his ability as a teacher, his talent as a tour guide, and his success as a writer of history. Mike was

honored by the government of Mexico in 1985 with the Order of the Aztec Eagle and by the government of Spain with the Order of Isabel the Catholic in 2005—both for his efforts as a foreigner in promoting the history of those countries.

Mike grew up in the Hancock area of Los Angeles, attending Harvard School for Boys (now Harvard-Westlake). As a child, he spent time living on a ranch in Baja California near the ruins of a Dominican mission that had piqued his interest in learning about a remote

area of the peninsula. Always a student of history, he received his B.A. from Loyola Marymount University, his M.A. from the University of Southern California, and his Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico. Mike spent the majority of his career as a professor of history at the University of San Francisco, and most of his summers traveling to Spain and Mexico to work in the Archivo General de Indias (Seville), the Museo Naval (Madrid), the Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City), and the archives of La Paz in Baja California.

In addition to his role as professor and author, Mike served as the director of the Mexican collection at the Sutro Library in San Francisco, and director of the Biblioteca Mathes at El Colegio de Jalisco in Zapopan, Guadalajara, Mexico, which houses a collection of rare books on the history of Mexico. In 1995, Mike donated his library of 45,000 titles to the library named in his honor. His own writings, some of which are listed below, include dozens of books, pamphlets, articles in journals, newspapers, conference proceedings, and letters to the editors in both English and Spanish publications. As a tour guide, Mike was unequaled in his knowledge of Baja California and his ability to make the most out of each day (and night). He was tireless.

After his retirement from the University of San Francisco, Mike led the fundraising efforts for CAREM, a non-profit historical society based in Tecate, Baja California. His efforts led to the construction of its history museum and the writing of his recent book, *The Land of Calafia: A Brief History of Baja California*. This work was added to his seven volumes written between 1961 and 1991 for the *Baja California Travel Series* published in Los Angeles by Dawson's Book Shop. Mike also collected numerous volumes of original manuscripts pertaining to the Spanish period in New Spain that he edited and published in Madrid and Mexico in bilingual editions.

Mike successfully lobbied for the National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH) to have offices in Mexicali so that federal actions involving Baja California's historic sites did not have to apply to the INAH office in Sonora. As of 2012 he was working with INAH, CAREM, the Ministry of Tourism of Baja California, and the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation to obtain UNESCO World Heritage status for *El Camino Real de las Californias*—the Spanish

mission trail spanning Baja and Alta California. His work in these areas continues to be carried out by those who followed his lead.

My own life paralleled Mike's because we became friends as fellow graduate students at the University of Southern California. Mike was working during the day as a bailiff in the Federal Court of Los Angeles where his father, William Carey Mathes, was a well-respected judge. My father, a lawyer, knew Judge Mathes from a number of cases he had argued in his court, so Mike and I started out with a common interest in the law—but not as prospective lawyers. We both received Del Amo Foundation Fellowships to write our doctoral dissertations in Spain, using original documents. We later both received Fulbright Fellowships to continue our studies.

Before leaving Spain, we spent the summer of 1960 in Mexico City, combing the archives under the direction of professor Donald Cutter, who instilled in both of us a love and respect for original sources. Mike tried to help me in speaking Spanish, but he was so fluent that he usually finished my sentences. After that summer I went directly to Spain, while Mike transferred to the University of New Mexico to continue with Dr. Cutter, who was teaching there. Mike soon joined me in Spain, and we spent time helping Robert Marx figure out how to build and sail a replica of Columbus's ship *La Niña* that Marx used to duplicate the voyage to the "New World" in 1963.

As life continued, I returned to California and eventually began teaching at the University of San Diego, while Mike joined the faculty at the University of San Francisco. We remained close friends—collaborating on articles, traveling to Baja California, and speaking at conferences in San Blas, Tepic, Mexicali, Tijuana, and elsewhere with Miguel Leon Portilla and other Mexican historians. I became fluent in Spanish, but no one could equal Mike in his ability to translate—with perfection—on the spot, no matter how long someone talked in either language. His talent was truly amazing in this area.

Many people who were close to Mike through the years have wonderful memories of him. Since it is difficult to include them all, here is a summary: Mike was welcoming, competent, friendly, patient, knowledgeable, helpful, funny, serious, opinionated, and—it seemed—always on a mission. His personal life was colorful

and perhaps as varied as his professional career. He loved women, and I was fortunate to be his friend and colleague—not his wife. Librarian Barbara Robinson, curator of the exhibit honoring Mike at the University of Southern California’s Doheny Library, commented that Mike as “author, editor, and translator of countless works, ...demonstrated that ‘history did not just begin at our southern border.’” The exhibit continues through May 2013.

David Rubiales, professor emeritus at Yuba College in Marysville, said it very well: “Mike Mathes was a great scholar, a wonderful conversationalist, and perhaps most importantly, generous to others. I first met him in 1969 at USF. As my graduate advisor he encouraged me and guided me through my masters program, demonstrating patience and kindness throughout. We lost touch with each other for quite a while but then reconnected a few years ago and that brought great pleasure to me and I hope for him as well. I am quite sure that my colleagues at the Book Club of California join me in mourning his passing. Mike was an original and will be long remembered but not easily replaced, and very lucky indeed was anyone whom he counted as a friend.” Cecilia Lopez added that “*Como una forma de reconocimiento a su colaboración le designamos Investigador Especial.*” [As a form of recognition for his collaboration, we designate him Extraordinary Investigator.]

Mike was indeed an extraordinary individual in the truest sense of the word. As a valued friend and remarkable scholar, he is a person not easily forgotten. His legacy lives on in his many publications, but his indomitable will and unique personality will live on in the hearts of the many who knew him.

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The following bibliography, while not exhaustive, contains a majority of Mathes’ principal contributions. Most of the citations (and bracketed notations) are drawn from Don Laylander’s extensive online Baja California database [<http://www.sandiegoarchaeology.org/Laylander/Baja/bibliography1.html>].

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