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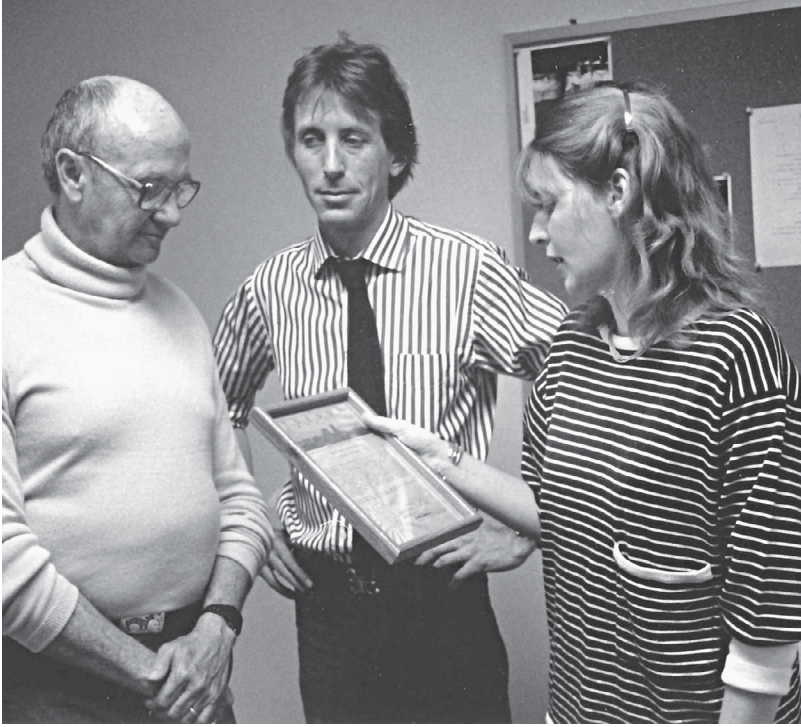
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**PUBLISHING THE SOUTHWEST  
IN MEMORIAM: BUNNY FONTANA**



*L-R: Bunny Fontana, Joseph Wilder, and Peggy Wilder circa 1992, presenting Bunny a “Copper Letter” of commendation from the City of Tucson.*

Bernard L. “Bunny” Fontana, esteemed editorial advisor to *Journal of the Southwest* and retired University of Arizona Field Historian, died April 2, 2016, in Tucson, Arizona, at age 85. For those working in the regional Southwest intellectual community, his death is akin to the burning of the classical library of Alexandria: an incredible font of wisdom and knowledge is gone forever. For those of us at *Journal of the Southwest* it is an epochal loss, felt daily.

Bunny (as he was universally and affectionately known) was born in Oakland, California, in 1931, raised in Yuba City, and attended the University of California, Berkeley, as an undergraduate. In 1955, he began his graduate work in anthropology at the University of Arizona, finishing his Ph.D. in 1960, and subsequently spent his entire career at the UA, working first in Special Collections in the UA Library for two years as Field Historian, then hired by

Emil Haury to be the Arizona State Museum's first ethnologist, and finally, after appointment in 1978 by president John Schaefer and Library director David Laird, as Field Representative in the UA Library. He retired, after more than thirty years' service, in 1992 to assume the life of independent scholar, which he pursued with rigorous discipline. Some of his well-known publications include *Tarahumara: Where Night is the Day of the Moon* (1979), *Of Earth and Little Rain: The Papago Indians* (1981), and *Entrada: The Legacy of Spain and Mexico in the United States* (1994), as well as dozens and dozens of scholarly articles, popular essays, reviews, bibliographies, and commentaries. Bunny was the recipient of many honors, including the UA Library's inaugural Library Legend Award in 2015 and the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008 from the Southwest Literature Project of the Tucson-Pima County Library and the Arizona Historical Society. He was one of the leaders of the academic movement in the 1970s that resulted in the formation of the Southwest Center at the University of Arizona, and was the guiding light of numerous organizations like the Southwestern Mission Research Center and the Patronato San Xavier. But it was informally that Bunny really left his mark. Whenever students and scholars would converse about the greater Southwest or wonder about a source or place or forgotten detail of history, invariably someone would say, "Well, let's ask Bunny!" We did, always, and we always got our answer.

Fontana, with his wife and children, lived since 1955 at the very edge of the San Xavier District of the O'odham reservation. In fact, the rambling adobe home's front gate was exactly on the demarcation line and guests parked their cars on the reservation in front of the house to visit. Fontana's family attended Mass at the nearest Catholic church: Mission San Xavier del Bac, thereby beginning for Bunny a 60-year love affair with the church, its art and history and preservation. Of Fontana's many, many books and articles – there are more than a dozen citations in *Journal of the Southwest* alone -- his crowning achievement is *A Gift of Angels: The Art of Mission San Xavier del Bac*, with photography by Edward McCain (Southwest Center Series, University of Arizona Press: 2010). The book is magisterial and massive, weighing well over eight pounds, with 350-plus pages large format text complemented by hundreds of color photographs. Both text and photographs are superb expressions of the exact detail and meaning of the church and constitute a summation of Bunny's life and passion. It is a timeless achievement and, as editor of the Southwest Center Series, it was for me the publishing opportunity of a lifetime.

On April 8, 2016, there was a memorial service at San Xavier for Bunny. More than 300 people packed the church and doorways outside to hear the stories and eulogies, the prayers, Bunny's beloved traditional Mexican music

performed by the Ronstadt family, and the blessings of a community united by interest and loss. Accolades have come from around the world, including this from Ridvan Isler, Turkish master restorer who had worked on the Mission: “I loved him very much. I am sure God take care of him in good place like his prophet.” And from Bob Vint, devoted friend and architect of the Mission restoration: “Bunny Fontana was a gentle intellectual giant among mere mortals, and the person most responsible for the preservation of Mission San Xavier del Bac. As a founding member of the Patronato San Xavier, he quietly orchestrated from behind the scenes the restoration of the eighteenth-century National Historic Landmark south of Tucson. Bunny assiduously avoided being elected president of the Patronato, serving instead for 20 years as the board Secretary – from which position he made sure that what needed to be done was indeed done. He knew more than anyone about the history of the Mission, about its builders and the meaning of its art. Bunny also deeply understood and appreciated the people by whom and for whom the Mission was built, the Tohono O’odham of Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora. His books *Of Earth and Little Rain* and *A Gift of Angels* capture the essence of Bunny’s deepest concerns: the humanity of this border region and its highest expression of faith. Bunny was possessed of a combination of wisdom and humility, and will be remembered with fondness by all who knew and treasured him for as long as we live.”

— Joseph C. Wilder

