

Robert W. Durrenberger

Bob Durrenberger, Professor Emeritus of Geography at Arizona State University, and a noted climatologist, passed away on October 20, 2012, at the age of 94.

Robert Warren Durrenberger was born in Perham, Minnesota, on October 2, 1918, the second of John and Angela Durrenberger's five children. Both his parents came from German immigrant families. His paternal great-grandfather, the first Durrenberger in the States, migrated from Württemberg in southern Germany in 1854 and settled as a farmer in the Minnesota River Valley. Likewise, both his maternal grandparents emigrated from Germany and settled in Minnesota.



Durrenberger began his higher education at Moorhead State Teachers College (now Minnesota State University Moorhead) in 1936, graduating four years later with a bachelor's degree in education.

In October 1940 he enrolled in the United States Army but immediately attended California Institute of Technology for a year, earning a B.S. in meteorology in 1941. He then served in the Air Corps in the southwest Pacific as a meteorologist.

After the Second World War, he was honorably discharged as a Major. He then married Bernadine Ann Stiegel from Minnesota in July 1946 and embarked upon his graduate education. First he attended the University of Wisconsin–Madison and studied for a master's degree in geography, his advisor being the cartographer Arthur Robinson.

Having graduated in 1949, Durrenberger and his wife moved to California where they adopted two babies – Daniel in 1952 and Mary Ann in 1954 – and he pursued a doctorate in geography at the University of California, Los Angeles. He worked under the supervision of Clifford Zierer, an expert in changing land use and urban expansion. His thesis, completed in 1955, was entitled “Climate as a Factor in the Production of Lemons in California.”

Durrenberger worked briefly at the University of Kentucky before being appointed to San Fernando Valley State College (now California State University, Northridge) in 1956 where he was a founding faculty member of the geography department. During his time there he served as department chair and dean of graduate studies.

During his time in California Durrenberger consolidated his focus on arid land research, environmental problems, agricultural geography and the southwest United States. Among his publications specifically about the state were the atlas *Patterns on the land: geographical, historical, and political maps of California* (1957 with many later editions), the books *California and the Western States* (1963), *Elements of California Geography* (1968), and *California, the Last Frontier* (1969), and the edited volume *California: its people, its problems, its prospects* (1971).

Other important publications during this period were *Environment and man; a bibliography* (1970) which covered topics such as ecology, natural resources, pollution, climate and conservation, and *Geographical research and writing*(1971), an aide for students.

In 1971, Durrenberger moved to Arizona State University (ASU) as a full-time professor of geography and continued with his research into the environmental challenges presented by rapid population and economic growth of the American southwest. Among his publications during this period was the *Dictionary of the environmental sciences* (1973) which explained 4,000 terms and concepts concerned with the environment drawn from many academic disciplines.

In the early 1970s, the federal government decided to turn over responsibility for maintaining state climate records and assisting with state-focused climate questions from NOAA to the individual states. Durrenberger saw the opportunity to situate the Arizona State Climate Office at ASU. The state named him as Arizona's first state climatologist in 1973. He was also the President of the American Association of State Climatologists in 1978-1979.

In the role of state climatologist, Durrenberger authored numerous publications specifically relevant to Arizona, including studies of precipitation, historical storms and floods, drought, and climate and energy in various regions of the state. He also served as editor-at-large for the *National Weather Digest*, the journal of the National Weather Association.

Concurrently, Durrenberger developed the climatology program at ASU into an internationally-recognized center for teaching and research. At the same time the Arizona Board of Regents also established the Laboratory of Climatology, an independent unit at ASU with a mission to serve the public, state agencies and businesses of Arizona by maintaining historical climate data for Arizona and conducting research in climate-related issues.

Minnesota State University Moorhead, where Durrenberger earned his undergraduate degree, presented him with its 1977 Distinguished Alumni Award, citing his contributions in education, climatology, and service to state and federal governments.

He stepped down from his post as state climatologist in 1979 and focused on solar energy development, directing a project to assess Arizona's solar energy resources and authoring a report on a solar radiation monitoring system for Arizona. He also served on the executive board of the Solar Radiation Division of the American Section of the International Solar Energy Society.

Durrenberger retired in 1982 and settled in Sun City, Arizona, where he enjoyed golfing, playing bridge, and spending time with friends and family.

Bob was preceded in death by his son, Dan, but survived by his beloved wife of 66 years, Bernadine, his daughter, Mary Ann, as well as three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

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http://www.aag.org/cs/membership/tributes_memorials/af/durrenberger_robert