REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
JOHN B. CORNELL

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for John B. Cornell, professor emeritus, anthropology, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
JOHN B. CORNELL

John Bilimer Cornell was a member of the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin from 1955 until his retirement in 1987, at which time he was appointed professor emeritus. His many accomplishments in the course of a distinguished career ranged from his help in breaking Japanese codes during World War II to his service as president of the American Ethnological Society, as program director for anthropology at the National Science Foundation, and as chair of the Department of Anthropology at The University of Texas. He died on March 15, 1994, in Decatur, Georgia, after an extended illness.

John Cornell was born on November 25, 1921, in East Chicago, Indiana, the son of Dana Cornell and Vivian Bilimer Cornell. He attended the East Chicago schools from kindergarten through grade twelve and then entered the University of Michigan, where he studied at the Army Intensive Japanese Language School before moving on to the Military Intelligence Service Language School at Camp Savage, Minnesota. He served in the Military Intelligence Commission from 1943 to 1946, rising to the rank of first lieutenant. After his language training he was posted to the Signal Security Agency in Arlington, Virginia, where he worked on early forms of computers to help break the “Purple Code” used by the Japanese in World War II. In 1945-46, during the immediate post-war occupation of Japan, he served as telecommunications censor in Fukuoka. In 1954 he was made a reserve captain.

Returning to the United States in 1946, he completed his AB that same year at the University of Michigan, graduating with distinction in Far Eastern languages and literatures. The following year he was awarded his MA with honors in the same field. Subsequently, while still at the University of Michigan, he moved into anthropology, earning his PhD in that discipline in 1953. After teaching for a year in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Wayne State University, Cornell came to The University of Texas at Austin as assistant professor of anthropology in 1955. He was promoted to associate professor in 1961 and to professor in 1965.

As a graduate student, Cornell was a member of the University of Michigan’s interdisciplinary Center for Japanese Studies and he served as director of the center’s Inland Sea Regional Survey in 1953-54. He remained a staunch supporter and proponent of area studies throughout his career. At UT Austin he served as chairman of the Asian Concentration Program from 1959 to 1964, as founder and codirector of the Summer Institutes on Asia from 1961 to 1963, as a member of the International and Area Programs Studies Committee in 1963-64 and from 1969 to 1971, and as its chair from 1967 to 1969. He was project director of the study of “Acculturation in a Modern Complex Society” conducted between 1965 and 1970 by the joint Texas-Cornell Inter-University Project on the Japanese in Brazil. He also served on the advisory committee of the Japan Foundation during its early years between 1977 and 1979. He was always active in the Association for Asian Studies, regularly attending its annual meetings and serving from 1983 to 1987 on its Bibliographic Computerization Project. In 1985 he participated in the Fourth International Studies Conference on Japan,
conducted by the European Association for Japanese Studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. He was also a member of the International House in Tokyo, and in his retirement he was active in the Japan Society of Georgia.

John Cornell served as acting chairman of the Department of Anthropology at The University of Texas at Austin from 1962 to 1964 and as chairman from 1974 to 1978. He was the program director for anthropology at the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C., from 1971 to 1973. He served as president of the American Ethnological Society in 1974-75. He was a fellow of the American Anthropological Association from 1953 until his retirement, a fellow of the Society for Applied Anthropology from 1972 to 1983, and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science from 1980 until his death.

Within the discipline of anthropology John was known for his dedication to ethnographic fieldwork, agro-ecological methodology, the theory of social organization, and, in the field of applied anthropology, to problems of agricultural policy and social justice. He conducted his initial fieldwork, which became the basis of his doctoral dissertation, in Matsunagi from October 1950 through August 1951. As reported by Richard Beardsley in the Introduction to *Two Japanese Villages*, by John B. Cornell and Robert J. Smith, John chose Matsunagi because it was an isolated mountain village not too distant from the Michigan Center for Japanese Studies. While the study can be classified as a community study, with more than two-thirds of its content being devoted to an account of social organization, it also contains a significant amount of information on natural resources and material culture. Doubtless this reflects the influence of Leslie White and Julian Steward, John’s mentors at the University of Michigan. In fact, Steward visited John in the field and was instrumental in directing him toward an intensive study of land tenure. As part of this endeavor John made detailed records of individual plot ownership and use in Matsunagi, and assembled more than 4000 typed 5” x 7” index cards, organized according to the format of numerical classification promoted by HRAF (The Human Relations Area Files). These records of land tenure and land use, along with genealogies, thousands of Ektachrome slides, and John’s original fieldnotes, as well as unpublished field data from his restudy of Matsunagi conducted in 1981 and his research into Japanese outcaste society conducted in Yokoi village in 1958, are presently maintained at Ohio State University by Professor Richard H. Moore, who studied with him at The University of Texas at Austin.

John Cornell’s most significant contribution to the study of Japanese social organization was grounded in his comprehensive account of the range of associations among households in Matsunagi. These included associations for the irrigation ponds, commons, water mills, threshing machinery, tobacco growing, threshing work, electrification of the grain mill, and glutinous rice (mochi) making, as well as personal and funeral ceremonial associations. By analyzing the social organization of these associations over time, Cornell was able to challenge the currently-prevailing theory, especially prominent in the work of Gamo Masao, which held that geography was responsible for the egalitarian social relations of southwest Japan, where Matsunagi was located. In Gamo’s theory southwest Japan was contrasted with the northeast, which was marked by a strongly hierarchical and nucleated social organization. Cornell showed that while Matsunagi was topographically similar to the isolated villages of Tohoku in northeast Japan, socially it was quite different. In his important article on “Local Group Stability in the Japanese Community” [*Human Organization* (22:2:113-125)] he argued instead that stable territorial and historical relations were the key variables, and that to understand that stability it was necessary to examine cultural change within the sub-hamlet unit.

John Cornell’s pioneer work in applied anthropology was colored by his strong commitment to social justice. His article on “Ainu Assimilation and Cultural Extinction: Acculturation Policy in Hokkaido” appeared in the journal *Ethnology* in 1964. He also published a number of other articles on outcaste policy based both on his original study of Yokoi in 1958 and on his restudy of the village in 1980.

Between 1965 and 1969 John served as project director for a study of acculturation among Japanese in Sao Paolo, Brazil, which was jointly sponsored by The University of Texas and Cornell University. He was also appointed visiting professor, graduate division, Escola de Sociologia e politica de Sao Paulo, Brazil, and conducted field research in southern Brazil under a grant from the National Science Foundation. The key publications resulting from this research were the work he coauthored with Robert J. Smith, Hiroshi Saito, and Takashi Maeyama, entitled *The Japanese and Their Descendants in Brazil: An Annotated Bibliography*, and his account of “Acculturation and Assimilation of Rural Japanese in Southern Brazil,” published by the Science
Council of Japan in *The Proceedings of the VIIIth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences II (Ethnology)*.

John Cornell’s scholarship was highly regarded in Japan as well as in the United States, and he was honored at various levels of society. In 1995 OHK, the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, did a special television program on John’s anthropological work, along with that of his colleagues Edward Norbeck and Robert Smith. In 1980 and 1981, after giving some public lectures in Japan while he was conducting his restudy of Matsunagi, he donated the honoraria he received to the villagers. Subsequently, Professor Toru Shinohara, who had served as John’s field assistant, reported in his article (in Japanese) entitled “The Revisit–Changes in an Anthropologist and the Village” that the villagers considered John Cornell a “good fellow” and that they had used the money he had given them to buy a chime for the village. The chime, which is located at the Civic Center, rings at noon and 6 p.m. every day, and is called the Cornell Chime. It serves to remind everyone of the American ethnographer who dedicated himself to understanding the local culture.

At the time of his death, John Cornell was survived by his wife, Dr. Regine Reynolds-Cornell; his mother, Viviani Bilheimer Cornell; his daughter, Dr. Mary Osterloh; his brother, Robert B. Cornell; his sister, Suzanne C. Dreesen; his stepsons, Dennis and Eric Reynolds; and a number of nieces and nephews.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors James Brow (chair) and Richard Moore (Ohio State University).

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on February 21, 2001. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: [http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/](http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/).