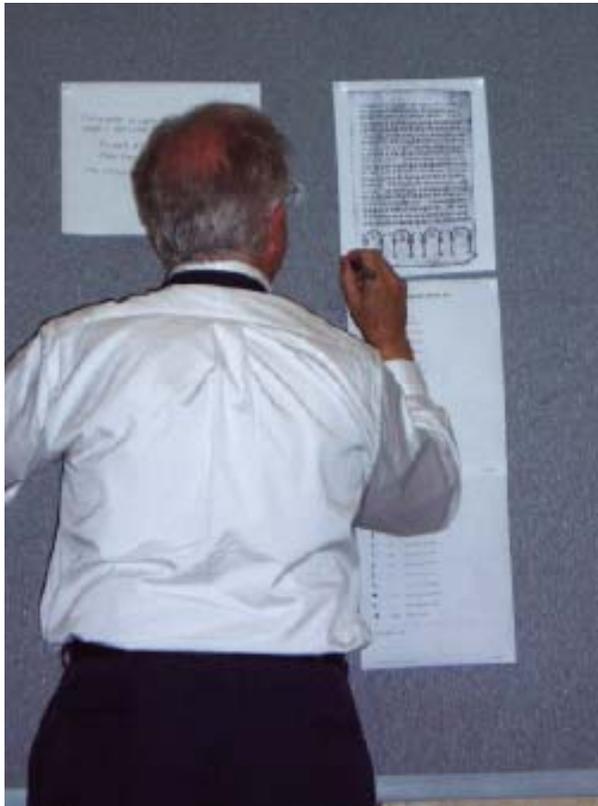


Jim Mason

Convenor for 20 years



Acknowledgments

Cover photograph: B. Tommie Usdin

Steam train clip art: www.rrhistorical.com, including signs from Ken Houghton Rail Images

Music and organ clip art:
www.bachorgan.com/ClipArt.html

Camera clip art: Free Gifs & Animations at
www.fg-a.com

Cardinal clip art: www.feebleminds-gifs.com

Hog clip art: www.kamsart.com/images/Animals

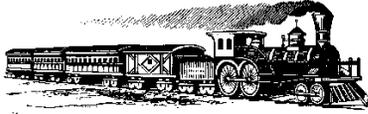
Zombie and werewolf clip art: www.4ourdegrees.net

Introduction

Dr. James Mason has chaired international standards committee ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 34—Document Description and Processing Languages—and predecessor committees and working groups for twenty years. To commemorate two decades of work, many of the technical experts who have participated in the committee's efforts over the years have contributed the following statements of appreciation, reminiscences, anecdotes, and photographs. This collection was presented to Jim during the XML 2005 Conference and Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, November 15–17, 2005.

SC 34 also honored Jim at its May, 2005, meeting in Amsterdam. The photographs shown below were taken then by Motomu Naito and Michel Biezunski.





Not being long enough in the club for anecdotes, Austri-alien Robert Barta has contributed something short:

Be it procedure or liaison, ask the man, that is, Jim Mason.



Has it been 20 years already? How time flies! It seems like only yesterday that we were in Boston celebrating the tenth anniversary of SGML and wondering what effect the birth of a little upstart (called XML) would have. Oh well, we all know the answer to that one.

There are two incidents that immediately come to mind when I recall working with Mason, perhaps they'll prove to be amusing. I met Jim in '82 when he joined ANSI X3J6. He came across as a brilliant thinker, but was also, at first glance, fairly quiet and somewhat straitlaced. This impression was eventually proved to be inaccurate.

At any rate, the first incident occurred at the Pointe in Phoenix (probably in '83 or '84) at one of our interminable two-week work sessions. We (myself, Mason, Gangemi, Davis, Goldfarb, Sharon, Kit von Suck [it's not pronounced the way it's spelled], and perhaps a couple of others) were engaged in a scintillating discussion about character sets. Goldfarb postulated that SGML needed a reserved character and proposed the smiley face (☺). Most, if not all, of us disagreed with him—first, about the need, and second, about the character itself. Goldfarb, as usual, didn't take kindly to our opinions and the discussion started to get quite heated. Finally, Jim made a telling point and Charles exploded with a rather unkind remark in response (I don't recall what it was, but it wasn't pleasant).

Jim's response was, "Well, fuck you, Charles!" The result was dead silence from everyone for a couple of seconds, followed by hysterical laughter. We never knew that Jim had a temper and he'd never used

profanity. We were totally nonplussed. It made the meeting.

The second incident occurred in Oxford, England, in April of '84. Bill Tunnicliffe had managed to get all of us to attend and speak at the first of what eventually evolved into the SGML Europe Conference. The conference was chaired by a guy (British) with a long string of letters after his name. When he introduced the speakers, he referred to those with degrees very respectfully as Dr. So and So, etc., and mentioned what discipline the doctorate was in. With everyone else (Jim included because he never made much about his background), it was all first names. I guess Jim took umbrage at that because when he got up, he started his speech, using his best Episcopal Deacon's voice, saying, "My doctorate is in German Philology." The Chair's jaw dropped. With that the power failed, the sound system died, and we were all in the dark. After probably 15 or 20 minutes, the power came back and the Chair arose and said "I'd like to once again invite **Dr. Mason** to address us." We all got a laugh out of that one.

Finally, I'd like to say that I've known Jim for 23 years and have enjoyed the years I spent working with him. We used to say kiddingly that SGML would change the world, but I don't think, in our wildest imagination, we guessed how right we were. I want to congratulate him upon reaching this milestone and wish him continued success in the future.

— Larry Beck



I met Jim in the mid-1980's, when I joined the group trying to draft a font standard. Jim's principal task often seemed to be nothing so much as herding particularly individualistic cats. Not only was he very good at this, but he usually appeared to enjoy doing it as well. He nearly always managed to extract "scrutable" prose and a consensus from his charges, commodities much valued in standards.

Out of the meeting room, he was always good company, being knowledgeable about many things unrelated to documents—pipe organs, trains, birds, ... When sightseeing or visiting a particular destination, he could be counted on to ask questions that sparked the locals to share interesting tidbits that weren't in the guidebooks.

Now that I'm no longer active in standards work, I miss the special camaraderie that Jim fosters so well. How he has managed to stay sane for so long is a wonder. May he continue in good fettle for at least another twenty years!

— Barbara Beeton



It was a great pleasure to work with you during the time I was active in WG 8. I have many fond memories from that time and am still amazed how we were able to do some of the marathon meetings—like the two weeks of WG 8/DSSSL special meeting in Knoxville where we stopped around 4:00 AM each day and only stopped so that we could be back at 9:00 AM! I am also still remembering how you managed to get us to do productive work at a meeting in Paris where the opening plenary took almost the full week. I am also grateful to Bettie, who inspired the host of a meeting in Montpelier to let us view various original manuscripts by Rabelais.

— Anders Berglund

P.S. Sharon [Adler] also sends her warmest regards. She has many fond memories of the time in WG 8 and wishes that there was enough time to have continued the work in ISO.



I've only known Jim since 1991, and I painfully regret not having joined the ISO working group before because I missed several years when Jim was already chairing. I owe a lot to Jim thanks to his continuous support and enthusiasm, even and especially when I was doing crazy things such as wanting to standardize topic maps. Jim has this very needed gift to make things and people hold together.

— Michel Biezunski



Jim Mason has been my model of the perfect standards chair since the moment I joined SC 18/WG 8 (now SC 34) in 1995. There's no doubt in my mind that SC 34 and the entire SGML effort owes its continued existence to his wise and careful management. I salute him on the occasion of his twentieth anniversary as chair of SC 34 and hope for our sake, if not for his, that he will continue in that role for a long time to come.

— Jon Bosak



I count myself a comparative newcomer to the standardisation scene, yet I've already come to appreciate the sage stewardship of SC 34 by our chairman, Jim Mason. Whether steering a course through the maze of ISO regulations, mediating in a dispute or discoursing on the application of Topic Maps, Jim always brings good humour and caniness to the table, and shows the way for the rest of us. Jim's leadership of ISUG too has been an asset to the community, helping to communicate the benefits of new markup technologies at the grass roots level, as well as in the more rarefied standardisation world.

Thank you, Jim, for your chairmanship of SC 34—long may it continue!

— Alex Brown

Getting up a head of steam

Over the last two decades, Jim has introduced me to many steam railroads around the world, on three different continents. Only once did I get the chance to reciprocate, but that was the day when Jim got to visit the greatest number of steam railways he ever managed to get to in a single day, and it was also one of the unforgettable opportunities he had to actually drive a train. And he did that in a Cider Mill while stone-cold sober!



Great Western tank engine 5786 is one of a small fleet of engines preserved by Bulmers in the yards of their Hereford Cider Mill. Jim was soon chatting happily to the crew comparing the size of their diminutive engine with the glories of the Pennsylvania Railroad he was used to travelling on. When it came time for the crew to trundle

passengers around the yard in the guard's van attached to the back of the engine Jim was still on the engine's platform, happily blowing the whistle and letting off steam before releasing the brakes. Though you can't tell it from this picture, this is the train that Jim drove back in 1986.

And you can see him at the controls here:

— Martin Bryan
Convenor, SC 34/WG 1





It is a delicious irony—which even a few of his non-British friends may understand—that Jim excelled as a student of several **dead** languages, but has spent the past twenty years nursing through birth and infancy some computer languages that are very much **alive** (and frequently **kicking**, he might add)!

The dazzling success of the progeny of the succession of Committees of which Jim has been Chairman is in no small measure due to the good humoured, sensitive, and pragmatic approach that he has sustained throughout all that time. No doubt his good humour has been sorely taxed at times, but he has maintained it throughout. The birth of an International Standard can indeed be likened to a very long and difficult pregnancy. Jim, like a good physician, has always known how to sooth the mother-to-be at moments of crisis.

It has to be admitted that we British participants have our peculiar methods for throwing spanners in the works at such moments of crisis. Jim has always managed these situations with a mixture of understanding and firmness, enabling him to continue to receive our respect and loyalty, in spite of our occasional differences.

Jim, on behalf of your British colleagues within SC 34, I salute you at this auspicious anniversary, I congratulate you on staying the course this long, and I look forward to your continuing to inject that amazingly effective mixture of realism and fun into our endeavours.

— Francis Cave

Chairman, BSI Technical Committee IST/41
Chairman, XML UK



I am honored to have the opportunity to express public thanks, appreciation, and respect for Dr. James Mason at this 20th anniversary celebration of his chairmanship in ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 34.

Rarely, almost never, have I met an individual so evidently filled with grace, integrity, wisdom, and inner character such that these qualities noticeably impact every work rendered for the public good. While I am familiar with Jim's many successes and contributions in areas of technical leadership, I am most deeply moved by his exemplary life and model of personal integrity which finds a way of affirming the good in all people, even when they are behaving badly.

Jim's accomplishments in changing public expectations, public policy, and corporate behaviors with respect to "open" standards will impact the standards world for many years to come. Occasionally at some personal risk, and with sacrifice of his own political position, Jim has championed the idea that published standards should be public standards, freely accessible to all. He has succeeded in making this ideal become reality within powerful standards organizations that strongly resist(ed) such new ideals, sometimes in conflict with ancient economic models that critically depended upon the sale of paper-print copies of standards—to the few who could afford such high prices.

I also publicly honor Jim for his dedication to standards advocacy through the International SGML/XML Users' Group, earlier known as the (International) SGML Users' Group (ISUG). This organization, though playing no prominent political

role since about 1996, has brought descriptive markup ideals and technologies to diverse communities in far-flung regions of the world. Jim pioneered several innovative solutions through ISUG which have enabled talented "mere individuals" to participate in otherwise closed standards processes.

Jim: thank you for living before us in a manner so tangibly filled with grace and truth that we can benefit not only from the result of your public service, but find ourselves reminded that **how** we live and love are even more important than what we individually accomplish.

— Robin Cover



Dear Jim,

Although I have only been involved with SC 34 for a relatively short time, I'd like to offer my sincere thanks for all your efforts over the years to co-ordinate a very demanding and diverse group of people in facilitating the making of useful and robust international standards. The world needs more people like you! As the only Australian delegate, I'd also like to warmly thank you for making me feel so welcome and comfortable in the group. I hope to be working with you for many years to come.

Congratulations on twenty years of ISO chairing, and best wishes from Australia!

Warm Regards,

— Anne Cregan
UNSW/NICTA Australia



While his “official” contributions as chair of ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 34 have been considerable, I have always found Jim to be a source of inspiration to continue the sometimes dogged process of standards formulation. As we all know, standards mavens are vain, contentious, opinionated—all things Jim is not—which can make for quite stressful meetings.

After one particular episode, which was resolved by the parties finally understanding they were in fact in vehement agreement (eventually), I was complaining to Jim about the non-productive stress level of the meeting. I don't recall if he mentioned any names, but he did point out in his history as chair, he had attended a meeting where one person was lecturing, while in the same room people were screaming at each other, while at least one other was in the corner crying. And yet, the result of (or perhaps in spite of) that process, was a successful international standard.

Beyond amusing and often inspiring stories about the standards-making process, Jim has always impressed me with his deep commitment to the standards process itself. That is to say, beyond simply being interested in this or that standard, Jim is committed to the existence of an international process considers the viewpoints of all participants and results in standards are a benefit to those who rely upon them.

His willingness to labor in the shadowy world of standards, which ultimately benefit millions of users, who are quite unaware of the standards that make modern life possible, is worthy of comment and to the extent possible, emulation by others.

Thanks, Jim, for twenty years of leadership!

— Patrick Durusau
Chair, V1–Text Processing: Office and Publishing
Systems Interface
Co-Editor, ISO 13250, Topic Maps–Reference Model



For the many years I have known Jim, he has been an inspirational leader. I have always admired his calm demeanor and tireless enthusiasm in his work with the standards committees. And sometimes I have wondered what he is really thinking behind that cheerful smile and Southern charm.

— Marion L. Elledge
Vice-President, Information Technologies Programs,
IDEAlliance



Jim, it is with pride that I look back on the years we shared on the SGML committee, working toward our common goal: a standard markup language for text. While the work was rewarding, even more so was the camaraderie after hours with the “Doctors” Mason and the rest of our elite group.

The years and circumstances have caused us to follow separate paths, but I will always consider you a colleague and friend.

Congratulations on this milestone anniversary.

— Joe Gangemi



Dear Jim,

Your 20th anniversary reminds me of my first standards meeting. I think it was in early 1985. It was definitely down in Florida and a storm was coming through. Yacht and other small craft owners had been warned to come into the Miami River for safety. You, Larry Beck, and Joe Gangemi kindly invited the newbie out to dinner with you. Afterwards, we stood along a bank of the river and watched yacht after magnificent yacht go by and we concluded that it must be possible to live luxurious, perhaps even fulfilling, lives without ever having heard of SGML. Possible, yes, but hard to fathom.

It’s been great working with you whether on the ANSI committee, as a conference speaker, as the President of ISUG, or in other roles, but always somehow looped around SGML, XML, Topic Maps and all the other important standards you shepherded into being. Your ability to keep things going forward and to keep everyone around the table made all the difference. Although we met through work, it has also been a treat to get to know you outside the committee room. I look forward to more opportunities over the coming years.

Best wishes on your 20th Anniversary.

— Pam Gennusa



Dear Jim,

Congratulations on your twenty(-)odd years of leading the committee.

We recall fondly the time spent seeking out the world's pipe organs and steam trains with you, watching you dismantle meeting room thermostats, and—in whatever time was left—developing a standard that changed the world.

Our best wishes for the future for you and Bettie and SC 34!

— Charles and Linda Goldfarb

Congratulations on your 20th anniversary as SC 34 chair. They say managing standards development is like herding cats (with a few wolves thrown into the mix), and you have managed it well. Thanks for all your efforts that have touched so many.

Best in the future,

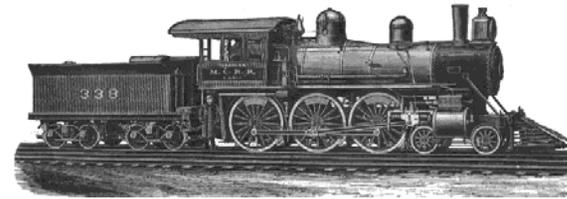
— Paul Grosso



Since joining what is now SC 34 I've looked to Jim for leadership first in my responsibilities as a member, and now more so in my responsibilities as the secretariat manager. Though Jim is not one always to let the rules of JTC 1 necessarily dictate how SC 34 makes its way through the standards maze of a process. He has long been pushing for SC 34's way of publishing standards to be more acceptable in the ISO process. He led our group in the use of our own standards for the documents he produces. I have merely followed in his footsteps in my role.

Jim is known to play hooky now and then at conferences and I benefited on one trip from his love of pipe organ music by joining him to listen to a recital on the Wanamaker organ in Philadelphia. Not only was the music wonderful to listen to, but Jim talked the music director into having us join a privately guided tour through the innards of the organ. Here I learned of Jim's sensitivity to heights as we traversed narrow catwalks three and a half stories above the ground floor looking down along a vertical 32-foot-long bass pipe. But what I came away with most was Jim's appreciation for the construction and the sound of organs, and the expertise he has gleaned from his love of the instruments. He contributed almost as much to the guide's talk as the guide had to say, and his opinion was respected by the guide and the others who were there.

— G. Ken Holman



Being newbies to ISO Topic Maps standardisation, we haven't much contact with Jim yet, but the contacts we had were really fruitful and Jim seems to us as a very important steering person. Therefore we call him Grandfather Topic Maps here in the Netherlands!

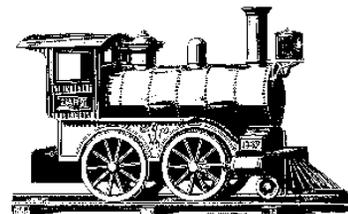
Thank you and best regards,

— Gabriel Hopmans



Any statement of appreciation from me would, I am sure, be lost in the chorus so I will share a small anecdote: I remember a conversation I had with Dr. Mason in Montreal, when he vividly conveyed his excitement at the levels of indirection necessary to cause a particular chemical reaction—a characteristic of his temperament that must have served him very well when dealing with the topic map community...

— Sam Hunting

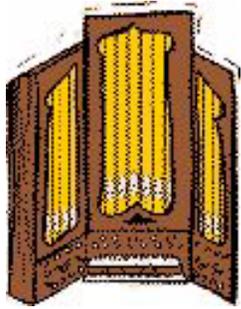


The long history of your great work in JTC 1, SC 18, and SC 34 is reconfirmed by old documents I have located in the document database of JTC 1/Japan:

- JTC 1 N1, Notice of Meeting/Draft Agenda, the 1st JTC 1 Meeting
- JTC 1 N95, JTC 1 Meeting Calendar
- JTC 1 N130, Resolutions adopted at the 1st Plenary Meeting of JTC 1

They were distributed at the first JTC 1 plenary, held in Tokyo, November 17–29, 1987. They are being sent to you separately in case you no longer have copies.

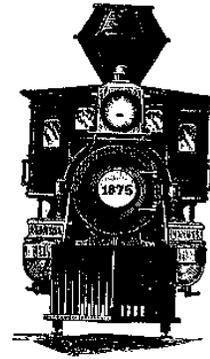
— Yushi Komachi
Convenor, SC 34/WG 2



If you can keep your head when all about you are
losing theirs...
And, yet, you **do** understand the situation,
You must be Dr. Mason!

Well done, Jim! Presiding over the ideas, egos, and
obstacles you have managed over the years is a feat!

— Debbie Lapeyre



Congratulations, Jim, on an impressive and inspiring
20 years of dedication. All the best,

— Derek Millar
CAC ISO/IEC JTC 1 SC 34



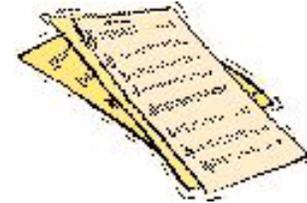
Congratulations!!!! It's amazing that you have been the chairman of our committee for 20 years. Thank you very much for your endless contribution to our committee.

- I hope you will be healthy and happy with your family.
- I wish what you want to do will be done successfully and wonderfully.
- Lastly, I really wish you'll come to Korea and meet me again next year.

Thank you, Jim.

Best regards,

— Jinie Min



Thank you very much for your passions, efforts, leading this committee for a long time, and continued works.

— Motomu Naito



I won't bother to reiterate the main points of Jim's years of dedicated service to the international information interchange standards community. However, there are many, many occasions when his extraordinary

efforts have had a vital impact on (read **"saved"**) my own work.

- I can't even enumerate the times he made peace between Charles Goldfarb and me, when communications between us became difficult. More recently, he picked up the pieces of topicmaps.org, including the various players in that drama, restoring comity, if not harmony, to the topic maps community. This takes not only skill, but also an even more demanding patience with those who have deeply conflicting philosophies.
- The fantastic amount of work he and Bettie have done on the SGML Users' Group, and particularly its publications, cannot be overlooked.
- Jim has made sure that ideas that have been contributed in the course of standards work have been accessible to the public, via the Y-12 Web site. It is impossible to overstate the importance or significance of this service, and it is impossible to see how it could have happened without Jim's constant efforts.

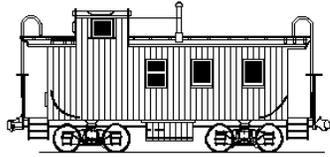
— Steve Newcomb



My first meeting with Jim Mason was at a WG 8 meeting in Redondo Beach, California in January 1992. The impressions I formed of him then did not change over the years I remained actively involved with standards work. Jim always made me feel welcome at meetings and inspired me through his examples of quiet competence and supreme organization. The more I learned about standards work, and the many personalities involved, the more impressed I was with Jim's ability to track, coordinate, and help develop so many standards. I also particularly remember seeing quite another side to Jim during a week of meetings in Exeter when he devoted such spare time as he had to visiting engineering works designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. I recently ran into Jim at SGML 2003 and exchanged a few words. It was great to see him still at the helm after so many years.

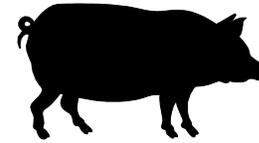
Best wishes to you, Jim!

— Brent Nordin



As a person who believes in the power of topic maps,
I am truly thankful for your leadership in shaping the
current topic map standards.

— Sam Oh
Head of Delegation, SC 34 Korea



Dear Jim,

Your 20th anniversary as
Chairman of SC 34 happens
to be my 10th anniversary
working with you, and I
would like to say thank you for all the support and
friendship you have shown during that time. From my
days as a rookie in Dublin in 1995 through to the last
few years as Convenor of WG 3, you have always been
there, guiding, advising, keeping the peace, and even
entertaining us with your hog calls.

SC 34 and its predecessors have always attracted
people of great passion, and from time to time the
temperature rises very high. Without you, we might
have ended up tearing each other limb from limb!
Without your leadership the achievements of SC 34
would probably not have existed. Thank you.

On a personal note, I will always treasure my
interaction with an extraordinary person, possessed of
weird interests similar to my own, ranging from
zombies and werewolves in Icelandic literature,
through pipe organs and steam engines, to classical
music and opera. And I'll never forget that
performance of the *Rite of Spring* in Berlin (and neither,
I'm sure, will you).

Once again, thanks for everything over these past 10
years. I'm looking forward to the next 10. All the best
to you and Bettie. Sylvia also sends her love to you
both.

— Steve Pepper
Convenor, SC 34/WG 3



Jim,

I admire your knowledge of the technical interests of every participant in the committee you lead as well as your ability to recognize the practical applications of each technical advance in our field. Your diplomatic skills are invaluable. I am sure that when you completed your dissertation in 1976, writing on *Monsters with human voices : the anthropomorphic adversary of the hero in Old English and Old Norse literature*, you did not anticipate the modern zombies and werewolves you would encounter in your professional life.

I always enjoy the side trips you and Bettie have invited me to join—the museums we have visited, concerts attended, and the shopping trips for local crafts in all parts of the world where the committee has met. Thank you for the photographic record you have kept of some of our excursions!

— Lynne A. Price



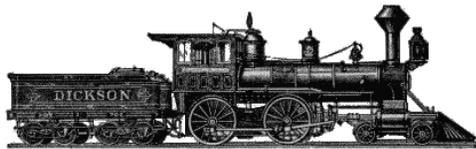
Hello, Jim,

Congratulations on your 20th anniversary, and thanks for your leadership during these past twenty years.

Best Regards,

— Roger Price

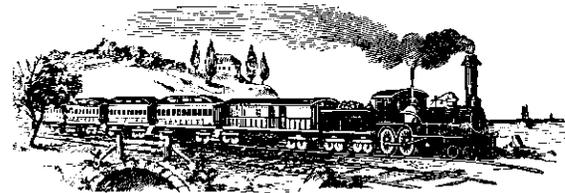
Association Française de Normalisation (AFNOR)



Jim,

It has been a great pleasure and an honor working with you over the years. Thank you for your contribution and dedication to the ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 34 committee, and for all your efforts to further the understanding and world-wide use of structured markup languages.

— Zarella Rendon



Jim,

I remember it well. You filled a critical gap in 1985, and brought a moderating influence to the committee back when it was vitally needed. Thanks for being one of the pioneers, and thanks for following on that path these 20 years and contributing so much to advancing the knowledge process.

Best wishes for your and the committee's continuing success.

— Norm Scharpf

P.S. On a personal note, Marianne sends her greetings as well, to you and Bettie, as we remember our “musical moments” together.



To: Dr. James David Mason

Twenty years of committee work for SGML and its family of standards sounds more like a life sentence meted out by a court rather than something that would be undertaken voluntarily. It is remarkable that you are celebrating the twentieth anniversary of your work for the ISO committee, indeed, for leading it for much of that time. Such work needs continuity, and you certainly provided that as it necessitated liaison with W3C in particular.

Above all it required dedication that came about only because of your great belief of the standards and their implementation and application. This was evident also as you gave of your time to the series of conferences organized by the GCA and then taking on the presidency of the SGML/XML Users' Group. You can look back on the last twenty years and feel proud of the contribution you made to the undoubted success of the take-up of structured information systems worldwide. Congratulations!

It was a joy to work with you, Jim. I guess it was your love of Bettie, organs, and steam engines that kept you sane through the years, and hopefully will continue to do so in the years ahead.

— Joan Smith



You bring a unique combination of technical knowledge and perspective to every activity. You get excited about new technologies and new ideas without getting sucked in to every new fad—and you are able to tell the difference. More important than that, however, is the courtesy and respect with which you treat everyone and every idea. It has been a real pleasure knowing you and working with you, and I hope to continue to work with you for many years.

— B. Tommie Usdin

P.S. I especially like these pictures of you with the top:





I've particularly valued Jim's patient keeping in touch with everyone through the Topic Map Reference Model "wars", and his contribution to keeping the Extreme Markup conference alive.

— Ann Wrightson