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Open letter to the AAG President

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Many of you have been dreading this moment but the time has finally come for me to put at least a partial climatological stamp on my Presidential term. Please judge my climatological bias with some leniency, however—perhaps recalling the lyric “there but for fortune go you or I.”

At the Great Plains-Rocky Mountains Division meeting last fall, I had a wonderful field trip to Fort Laramie. My seat companion on the bus was Pam Showalter, a PhD student at Colorado, Boulder. She was giving a paper at the meeting on “The Browning Earthquake Forecast—Some Findings Regarding Public Response Prior to, and Following December 3, 1990.” (It won the prize as the best student paper at the meeting.) As most climatologists know only too well, Mr. Browning billed himself as a climatologist even though such a claim did not seem to be supported by much of his earlier work. In a questionnaire circulated to inhabitants of four communities in the predicted earthquake area around New Madrid, Pam asked among other things, “Do you know what a climatologist is?” She provided a number of possible responses—some right and some wrong—as well as one response that conveyed complete ignorance about climatologists. Results from her survey showed that 48 percent of those responding “did not know” about climatologists and could not even hazard a guess from the several possible answers given, while 7 percent gave a wrong answer suggesting that they did not know either. Only 12 percent gave a correct or partially correct answer. This might bring little comfort to my climatological colleagues. Some may have started to believe that our contributions are so vital and so visible that the world knew about us and could not do without us. Of course, when I mentioned these figures to one colleague, he was quite pleased that nearly one out of every two people in those rural communities knew what climatologists did. Maybe that is the better way to view the numbers—the glass is half full.

NSF News - The Formation of a New Directorate

On 11 October, National Science Foundation Director Walter Massey announced the formation of a separate directorate for the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences that has been designated SBES. The social sciences (including the Geography and Regional Science Program) have here­tofore been part of the Behavioral, Biological, and Social Sciences (BBS) Director­ate. The new directorate will give the behavioral and social sciences more effective representation within NSF and the Congress and should lead to increased funding for the components of the new directorate.

The structure of the new SBES directorate is now taking shape. There will likely be four substantive (research funding) divisions within the directorate, with the following components and budgets:

- Division of Anthropological and Geographical Sciences ($1.3 million)
- Anthropology Program
- Geography Program
- Division of Cognitive and Behavioral Science ($12 million)
- Language, Cognitive, and Social Behavior Program (with several program elements)
- Division of Economics and Management Science ($22 million)
- Decision, Risk, and Management Science Program
- Economics Program
- Division of Social Sciences ($16 million)
- Law and Society Program

Continued on Page 3
great difficulty in identifying what the
people know that we are geographers when,
for instance, we make public presentations,
statements to the press, or engage in
discussions with colleagues within or outside
academic. In other words, we need to
make the public, state and federal officials,
the media, as well as our own University
colleagues, aware of what we are doing,
how we analyze a body of data, how our
approach aids in the understanding of
particular problems and in achieving solutions,
and what is distinctive about our
approach. We probably have not done the
most effective job in selling our geographical
approach to our colleagues, those in the
public with whom we deal. While we are attempting
to rectify the “geographic illiteracy” of
our students, we must also be certain that
the public is “literate” about the fundamental
contributions that geography and geographers make to our understanding of
the human, cultural, economic and physical
processes that mold the world in which we live.

Russ Mather

Journal Back Issues Sought

The Phoenix International Development
Foundation, through the United Nations,
seeks donations of the Geographical
Magazine, for use by developing Asian
country. Sixteen sets of issues from 1985
to present are desired, partial sets accepted.
The Foundation is also looking for multiple
sets of Scientific American and National
Geographic for the same period. If you
can offer a donation, please call Judy at
301/654-0850.

Fall 1991 AAG Regional Division Meetings

Great Plains - Rocky Mountain
The 1991 Great Plains - Rocky Mountain
Division Meeting was held 5-7 September
in Laramie, Wyoming with record attendance
of 270. The social event, a cookout,
included a 45-minute trip on the Wy­
oming-Colorado Railroad out to a working
ranch, the Vee Bar, for a BBQ and enter­
tainment by a storyteller. Wild horses and
prong horn were viewed from the train.
Roughly 81 high quality papers were pre­
sent. The 1992 chair of the GPRM
Division is Charles Busing from Kansas
State; the 1992 meeting will be in Manhat­
tan, KS. The 1992 Vice-Chair to become
the 1993 chair is Gary Guile from Colo­
rado; the 1993 meeting will be in Boulder,
CO. Bimal Paul from Kansas State will
remain as Secretary-Treasurer for the next
two years to fulfill his term.

New England - St. Lawrence Valley
The New England - St. Lawrence Valley
Geographical Society held its annual meet­
ing at Concordia University in Montreal,
4-5 October 1991. The conference theme
was “Toward the Millennium.” The fol­
lowing persons were elected to the
Society’s executive committee: Leon
Yachter, Southern Connecticut State
University, President; Mark Okzani, Plymouth
State College, Vice-President; John
Harmon, Central Connecticut State Uni­
versity, Secretary-Treasurer; and Mildred
Sarmen, Salem State College, Regional
Councillor.

West Lakes
The Geography Department of the Univer­
sity of Minnesota, Duluth hosted the
42nd Annual Meeting of the West Lakes
Division on 10-12 October 1991. Fifty­
four presentations arranged into 14 differ­
ent sessions provided the major academic
emphasis for the conference. A hour

Tim La Fik Releases New
Recording

Tim Fik, Assistant Professor of Geogra­
phy at the University of Florida, has just
released his new album. Tim “La Fik”
performed at the 1991 AAG Annual Meet­
ing in Miami during the Fiesta del Caribe.
Local Florida stores carry the recording
and cassettes are available by mail for
$6.95 (including shipping and handling).
Send orders to: Al-Omega Productions,
c/o Tim La Fik, 7412 N.W. 21st Court,
Gainesville, FL 32606.
man occupation and use of the earth. Both share a growing interest in the power of GIS and remote sensing to advance their common and respective research agendas. For the last reason, shifting MMSSS to the Anthropology and Geography Division would make good sense. As cartography, GIS, and related technologies come to incorporate automated analytical routines, the anthropologists and geographers will become increasingly concerned with the issues addressed by the MMSSS Program.

Physical geography should fare well under the new structure, which will enhance the prospects for a separate physical geography program element (anthropology has three elements). The attitude of the other social science programs in the old SES toward physical geography ranged from skepticism to outright opposition to funding physical science projects in a social sciences division. The familiarity of anthropologists with the human-physical complementarity will eliminate such tensions within the anthropology-geography division, and will enable both to do a more effective job of reminding the directorate's leadership that NSF was designed to serve science as it is practiced, not as it happens to be divided up by NSF's divisions and programs.

The AAG and its members should take great pride in the establishment of the SBES Directorate at NSF. The AAG, along with other behavioral and social science societies and the Consortium of Social Science Associations, worked hard to bring the new directorate about. Geographers Risa Palm and Peter Rogerson served on the BBS Task Force that recommended the change.

SBES is yet another sign of the growing esteem in which the behavioral and social sciences in general and geography in particular are held by the nation's scientific establishment. I think SBES augurs well for the discipline's future.

Ron Ahler

Watch your mail for AAG Annual Meeting registration materials. Preregistration deadline is 28 March 1992

It also happens to baseball managers

'As we were saying before we were interrupted... That remark, or something like it, has been made in recent years by a number of writers, or by newspapers and magazines, that have reappeared after a period in which publication was banned or heavily censored.

No one, let it be said immediately, either banned or censored the 'Notes by Ptolemy' column that appeared in The Geographical Magazine (London) until its sudden disappearance after August 1987. What happened was a legitimate exercise of prerogative by a new editor of the Magazine. Having contributed well over 200 monthly 'Notes' up to that time, Ptolemy was in no position to dispute the editor's view that it was time for a change. But the decision was abrupt, and it certainly left Ptolemy a little scarred. He will even admit to a certain amount of satisfaction that the editor's own tenure proved to be a brief one.

Any remaining scars were rapidly erased by the invitation to provide a Ptolemaic renaissance in the AAG Newsletter: As in the column's previous incarnation, the intention is to cast an irreverent eye over things geographical throughout the world, whether or not the things in question can be attributed to professional geographers. The column rests on a firm belief that geography is a vital discipline, and that being a geographer is a piece of luck that happens to too few people. (In Ptolemy's case, it happened because a school principal, hearing that one of Ptolemy's colleagues hoped to specialize in history at university, determined that this would require extra Latin immediately. Ptolemy decided on the spot to become a geographer.)

What in fact were we saying before we were interrupted? The August 1987 column now seems somewhat prophetic, as three of the four Notes had an American flavor. Ptolemy manically reminded physical geographers that 'Pregnant Camcids Oftcn Sit Down Carefully. Perhaps Their Joints Crack Painfully. Early Oiling Might Prevent Possible Hernia.' Apart from the pleasure of starting an English sentence with two words beginning Pt...m, this is still a useful way of remembering geological time: Precambrian, Cambrian... Holocene. A second Note mentioned problems caused by the three-year delay in launching the Galileo spacecraft: deli cate items are having to spend much longer in the corrosive atmosphere of Earth than expected.' Prophetic also, in view of Galileo's current data transmission difficulties? Ptolemy also grumbled about a published description of the Mauna Kea observatory as 'close to the equator'; also about a telescoped (90 minutes!) re-enactment of the American War of Independence, somewhere in eastern England, that apparently had British and French troops fighting on the same side. (Of course, if this changed the result...!) So, if this is your first meeting with Ptolemy, you now have some idea of what you are in for, until the next exercise of editorial prerogative.

Back to Avalon, not Camelot

It is appropriate to begin a new, transatlantic, series of Notes with a reference to what is arguably the best source of contemporary geography available, The Economist weekly. Regular readers know its habit of thoughtful supplements on different places and topics; that included with the issue for October 26, 1991 was a survey of America. It was provocatively titled 'The Old Country'. Old, not in a sense of senile decline, but in the sense of continuity of valuable experience. It is the thesis of the author, Michael Elliott, that the period between the late 1940s and the late 1960s was anomalous: 'America got fat and happy on the back of a historical accident: the consequence of two world wars... If only America could grasp that truth, it could recover its self-confidence, instead of pursuing the ultimately hopeless task of trying to recreate a dreamtime.'

Elliott's icon, gazing down on contemporary America from almost all the 26 pages of the survey, is Theodore Roosevelt. America's future, in his view, will have more similarities with the immigrant view of America in 1914 in the film 'Avalon', 'the most beautiful thing they had ever seen', than with the boom of mid-century Camelot. The survey is full of facts and comparisons, even if you don't accept the thesis.

While on the subject of 'T.R.', Ptolemy is unsurprised to find (not from the survey but from a dictionary of quotations) that he coined the phrase 'lunatic fringe'. But did you know that he described Maxwell House coffee (in 1907) as 'good to the last drop'? Remember: you learned this from the Ptolemy column.