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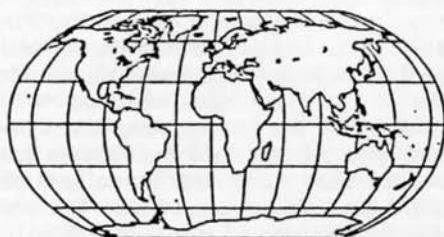
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The Geographic Society and Gamma Theta Upsilon at Arizona State University

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Throughout most of the history of Arizona State University (founded in 1885) there has been a strong student organization devoted to the study of geography and the state of Arizona. This organization was established early, and once established, it always existed. A club such as this one is particularly important to students, since belonging to a small group leads to comradery and lifelong friendships, and it can be a valuable learning experience. One of the main goals of the geography student organization was always the taking of field trips, and such field trips are fondly remembered by ex-members. Prof. Fred Irish took geography students on field trips between 1900 and 1914, as he loved to camp out, travel the state, and comment on the physical environment. However, no geography club was established at this time.

The first geography club, known as the Geographic Society, was established under the direction of Prof. Jonas W. Hoover in 1924, the year he arrived (Comeaux, 1979). The student newspaper the *Tempe Normal Student*, on December 16, 1924, stated that several weeks earlier a group of students conceived the idea of an organization of students interested in the study of teaching of geography. They held a meeting with Mr. Hoover to discuss the matter. After the school president approved of the society, the students and Hoover held another meeting and formally organized the Geographic Society. The paper went on to state that "Members must meet the requirements in general scholarship as laid down for the literary societies, and must also meet a special geographic requirement, as to scholarship and interest, or, foreign travel with educational purpose or value, or professional work of geographic character publically recognized." It also stated that Arizona was "the subject of study," and proposed activities, including lectures and field trips on Saturdays and weekends. The first president was Margaret James, and the next year she was re-elected to a second term. At first it was not intended to be strictly a student organization, but as members graduated and went out to teach, they would be



FIGURE 1. Jonas W. Hoover (1889–1979) when he first arrived at what is now Arizona State University.

“missionaries of good geography teaching,” and they would keep in touch with the Tempe organization.

The Geographic Society was composed of a group of young and enthusiastic members. There were many articles of the group’s activities in the school newspaper and in various yearbooks. The 1925 yearbook, *The Sahuaro*, for example, had a picture of the members, and stated that it was “the only organization of its kind on campus,” and that it was “a society for geographic and physiographic study, specializing on the State of Arizona.”

One of the interesting things about the

organization is the fact that they kept a scrap book that contained newspaper articles of their activities and pictures of their adventures in the field. That scrap book still exists, and is kept on file in the ASU Archives. It contains many historic photographs, such as a 1927 photograph of some of the giants in geography, William Morris Davis, Albrecht Penck, and Penck’s assistant, Albrecht Haushofer (son of Carl Haushofer, who later was murdered by the Nazis during W.W.II). A quick glance at this book will indicate just how active the group was. The scrap book covers the Hoover years (1924–43) and when he left, nothing more was added to

this book. Another scrap book was started by GTU members in 1986.

One of the first things the Geographic Society did was to write a constitution. This constitution, in a very detailed way, spelled out the requirements and workings of this new organization. Soon afterward, Mr. Hoover wrote a theme song for the group. The first verse is this:

in my little kiddy car.
I aim to wander very far.
In every town I'll raise the dust.
From Yuma to Laveen or bust.
To wander far shall be my fate.
I need no rules for traffic.
For I'm a GEOGRAPHIC.

CHORUS: She (or He) needs no rules of traffic.
for she's a GEOGRAPHIC.
We all are GEOGRAPHICS.

Other verses had the GEOGRAPHICS traveling around the state by rail, horse, areplane (sic), walking, and even sailing on the Salt and Gila Rivers.

A chapter of Gamma Theta Upsilon was established on the Arizona State campus on May 15, 1932. GTU was initially established by Dr. Guy Buzzard at Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) in 1928 (he later taught at ASU from 1959-61). Three years later, in 1931, it was decided to make GTU a national honorary geography fraternity, with ISNU as Alpha Chapter. Arizona State received the Theta Charter, and was thus the eighth chapter established. The school newspaper, *The Collegian*, on May 13, 1932 stated that a chapter of GTU was being established, and that "a high standard of scholarship and character is required for membership. Prospective members must have a minimum of a year's work in collegiate geography, or special merit, and must at least be pursuing a minor in the department." At the time there were 17 eligible for membership.

Although a GTU chapter was established in Tempe, the Geographic Society continued to exist. Many persons had dual memberships, and the 1938 Yearbook stated that GTU was "associated" with the Geographic Society. Between the departure of Hoover in 1943 and 1950, GTU was not active, but at this time the

Geographic Society remained a viable and active organization (this was probably because there was no sponsor who was a GTU member). After GTU was reactivated in 1950, many persons did not match the requirements needed to join, and some did not want to pay the fees to join the national, so rather than isolate them from participation, they were initiated and allowed to take part in GTU activities. Thus, in an informal way, the Geographic Society continued to exist, and still does. Formally, however, it seems to have ended with the reactivation of GTU in 1950, because in 1951 they did not file their membership list and thus lost their official status as a recognized group (*State Press*. Nov. 2, 1951).

GTU at ASU is fortunate to always have had strong leadership from various professors. For an honor society to be successful, it must have strong support from the faculty and administration, and in this respect students at ASU have been fortunate. Prof. Hoover always supported the two groups (GTU and The Geographic Society), but when he left, there was no geographer here to be adviser to GTU. The Geographic Society and GTU did continue to exist, however, as a picture of club members regularly appeared in the yearbook. Sponsors of the group during this formative period were a series of professors. In 1950 GTU formally was reactivated, and two faculty members were initiated into GTU. The following year Professor George Renner, III joined the faculty, and he became a strong supporter of the group. Through the 1950s and 1960s various faculty were sponsors, as Renner, Virgil Baker, Lloyd Haring, Stanley Ross, Jerzy Zaborski and others. Between 1969 and 1995, Malcolm Comeaux and Ray Henkel were co-sponsors, and with the retirement of Prof. Henkel in 1995, Professors Comeaux and Brendan O'hUallachain have sponsored GTU.

The department has always provided GTU space and a desk to keep all files and materials. We are allowed use of the department van for field trips (the department even pays for the gas used). We are fortunate to have such strong support. Each year new members are initiated into

the organization, and as of 1996, Theta Chapter has initiated 591 persons. Guest speakers at meetings are still an important part of GTU life at ASU, as it was in the days of Hoover. Afternoon, one-day and weekend field trips also remain very much a part of GTU life, and they un-

doubtedly bring back fond memories to chapter alumni.

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