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# Open letter to the AAG President

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

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 45 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,

Continued on Page 2

### IN THE NEWSLETTER

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Books Received .....                    | 17 |
| Calls for Papers .....                  | 15 |
| Conferences and Courses .....           | 19 |
| Forthcoming Professional Meetings ..... | 20 |
| Grants and Awards .....                 | 6  |
| Grant and Competition Deadlines .....   | 5  |
| Jobs in Geography .....                 | 7  |
| New appointments .....                  | 15 |
| Of Note .....                           | 16 |



THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS

# AAG NEWSLETTER

Volume 27 Number 1 January 1992

## 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: Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate

- o Division of Anthropological and Geographical Sciences (\$13 million)
- o Anthropology Program
- o Geography Program
- o Division of Cognitive and Behavioral Science (\$12 million)
- o Language, Cognitive, and Social Behavior Program (with several program elements)
- o Division of Economics and Management Science (\$22 million)
- o Decision, Risk, and Management Science Program
- o Economics Program
- o Division of Social Sciences (\$16 million)
- o Law and Society Program

- o Political Science Program
- o Sociology Program
- o Measurement Methods and Statistics for the Social Sciences Program

There is currently some discussion of shifting the Measurement Methods and Statistics for the Social Sciences Program (MMSST) to the Anthropology and Geography Division.

SBES will also house the Division of International Programs, which funds collaborative research in all subjects with other countries throughout the world, and the Division of Science Resources Studies, which conducts research on scientific facilities and personnel but does not fund external research.

The new structure offers great opportunities for growth for all the behavioral and social sciences. All the social sciences were lumped together in the old SES (Social and Economic Sciences) Division. The separation of the old SES components into three divisions offers greater opportunities for leadership and for budget expansion. Anthropologists at NSF are excited about the prospect of joining geography in the new division.

The pairing of anthropology and geography in a single division strikes me as a particularly happy circumstance. Anthropology shares with geography an internal complementarity between physical science and social science concerns. The two disciplines share a tradition of field work and an intense interest in primary data. Both have long-standing interests in hu-

Continued on Page 3

## San Diego 1992: Special Air Fares

### Special Air Fares from Delta Air Lines & United Airlines:

Conventions in America, the official travel company for the AAG, is offering significant savings on airfares with Delta and United: 45 percent off coach class fares (40 percent off Canadian fares on Delta). 5 percent off the lowest applicable fares, First Class to SuperSaver! Seven day advance purchase and other restrictions

apply. Travel between 15-25 April 1992. **Call Conventions in America at 1-800-535-1492, ask for Group #552.** They will guarantee the lowest fares on any airline and you will receive free travel extras. Or call the airlines directly: United: 1-800-521-4041, refer to Tour Code #513VN. Delta: 1-800-241-6760, refer to File #N0577.

not half empty.

Let me not be too tough on climatologists and at the same time, extend these musings to all of geography. Consider what might have happened if Pam had asked "Do you know what a geographer is or does?" My guess is that she would have discovered about the same level of understanding. It seems that the public still has great difficulty in identifying what the profession of geography is all about. We need to enhance our image or at least let 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 academe. 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, our Universities, and 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 Wyoming-Colorado Railroad out to a working ranch, the Vee Bar, for a BBQ and entertainment by a storyteller. Wild horses and prong horn were viewed from the train. Roughly 81 high quality papers were presented. The 1992 chair of the GPRM Division is Charles Bussing from Kansas State; the 1992 meeting will be in Manhattan, KS. The 1992 Vice-Chair to become the 1993 chair is Gary Gaile from Colorado; 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 meeting at Concordia University in Montreal, 4-5 October 1991. The conference theme was "Toward the Millennium." The following persons were elected to the Society's executive committee: Leon Yacher, Southern Connecticut State University, President; Mark Okrant, Plymouth State College, Vice-President; John Harmon, Central Connecticut State University, Secretary-Treasurer; and Mildred Berman, Salem State College, Regional Councillor.

### West Lakes

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

## Tim La Fik Releases New Recording

Tim Fik, Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Florida has just released his new album. Tim "La Fik" performed at the 1991 AAG Annual Meeting 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.

harbor tour of the Ports of Duluth-Superior with a luncheon served on board the tour boat was the highlight of the social portion of the meeting. A slide presentation on Svalbard by Professor Matti Kaups of UMD was featured during the evening banquet. Department Head Graham Tobin welcomed the group and introduced the speakers at the opening sessions. The energy of the business meeting focused on a report from AAG Executive Director Ron Abler and the resultant very spirited discussion of the switch in printer/publisher for AAG publications. At the business meeting Gordon L. Levine, University of Minnesota, Duluth, was elected Chair of the Division; Joseph J. Hobbs of the University of Missouri was elected Secretary and Mehmet T. Aritan of University of Wisconsin-La Crosse continues in his position as Treasurer. Next year's meeting will be held on 10-12 October 1992 at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

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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 divvied 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 Abler

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

## NOTES FROM PTOLEMY

### 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 in office 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 mnemonically reminded physical geographers that 'Pregnant Camels Often Sit Down Carefully. Perhaps Their Joints Creak Painfully. Early Oiling Might Prevent Possible Hernia.' Apart from the pleasure of starting an English sentence with two words beginning Pt..mn, 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.