

# Guest Essay

## A RETROSPECTIVE ESSAY ON THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE

New England - St. Lawrence Valley Geographical Society

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### Introduction

The mission of the New England-St. Lawrence Valley Geographical Society (NESTVAL) is to support geography and geographers in New England and the St. Lawrence Valley. Twice a year the region's representative reports to the Association of American Geographers (AAG) Council on the health of geography in the region and efforts to sustain the discipline. NESTVAL supports the geographic scholarship of individuals by offering them a forum at the regional meeting and in its publications. It seems appropriate in this inaugural volume of *The Northeastern Geographer* to consider the evolution of the Society's publications in meeting the changing concerns of the discipline and of practicing geographers from the earliest days of NESTVAL to the present.

### The Beginnings of NESTVAL

The first meeting of the New England Geographical Conference took place at Clark University in 1922 (Meeks 1975). At subsequent meetings, mainly at Clark under the leadership of Wallace Atwood, the emphasis was on teaching geography. Distinguished geographers based at America's most prestigious institutions met with schoolteachers and faculty at teacher training institutions to promote the discipline. The job of state representative was to organize teachers at colleges and schools: Yale's Ellsworth Huntington was Connecticut's State Representative at one time. The Conference became an AAG division in 1952, added the St. Lawrence Valley in 1954, and adopted the present name in 1956. Between 1952 and 1971, according to Hal Meeks (1975), the Society isolated itself increasingly from schoolteachers. Three decades later, despite repeated efforts, the means have not been found to attract this constituency. In retrospect, it seems that state and province representatives on the NESTVAL Executive Committee should maintain a liaison role to the region's teacher alliances.

### The NESTVAL Newsletter

The first *Newsletter* appeared in 1949. An annual roundup of reports about people, departments and meetings, the *Newsletter* has kept the membership informed since then. The 60 years of *Newsletters* are also the Society's most important archival resource. Until the mid 1980's the NESTVAL archives were housed at Clark University under the supervision of Bill Koelsch but this arrangement faded away during the 1980's. The Society needs to re-establish a formal

archive where scholars can retrieve the records of its history including publications and the programs of its meetings. This should be maintained in a volunteer department or by the AAG. Collecting information electronically for the *Newsletter* and distributing it electronically means far less work for the editor than formerly and the *Newsletter* could be a biannual publication, as in the 1970's. Paradoxically, at the time of writing, the last *Newsletter* was the 2006 edition. The embryo NESTVAL website does not replace the *Newsletter* but should include and supplement it.

## The Proceedings

The first *Proceedings* of the Society was published in 1972 as a joint publication with the Middle States Division of the AAG recording the scholarship presented at the 1971 meeting at Columbia University. In the 1976 *Proceedings*, Richard Riess (Salem State College), the first Editor, recalled that a motion for the publication of an annual journal was defeated at the 1966 annual meeting. Further discussion in following years resulted in the establishment of a proceedings rather than a regional journal. The intent was to encourage the presentation of papers at the annual meetings by promising the publication of good quality manuscripts. Before 1971, seldom were as many as a dozen papers presented at the Annual Meeting. The results of the new publication were gratifying, Riess said, in quality and quantity. In 1971, Riess received thirteen manuscripts and published eleven in full. These numbers increased during his editorship so that he received 40 manuscripts for the 1976 Proceedings and published 28 in full (Riess 1976). The major problem was the cost overrun and time delay of professional printing which involved typesetting at that time.

When I became editor in 1977 I knew that the meager budget precluded using a commercial printing house and was painfully aware of dire consequences should I fail to deliver the 1977 Proceedings at the 1978 meeting. I avoided disgrace by having the manuscript typed onto special plates and printed in the Anthropology Department at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) and by stapling and trimming the copies myself in the university's print shop in the hours before leaving for the meeting. Subsequent technological advances made printing much easier but editing took time even without peer review. I was greatly helped by John Harmon (Assistant Editor: CCSU) and by David Frost and Max Barlow of Concordia University. Over much of the past 30 years, lower printing costs in Quebec helped the Proceedings stay within budget.

One characteristic of the early years of the *Proceedings* was editorial continuity. Dick Riess served for six years and I was responsible for eight annual publications. Lately, it has been the Society's practice for the editor to be one of the organizers of the annual meeting. Inaugurating *The Northeastern Geographer* is intended to restore editorial continuity. During the 1970's and 1980's some 25 to 30 libraries in and outside the region placed standing orders for the *Proceedings*. These have dwindled away. The revenue was useful but accessibility to the scholarship a more important policy consideration then and now. Throughout the life of the *Proceedings* articles on a full range of regional topics formed roughly half the content of most volumes. These would constitute a thick but highly disparate compendium on the geography of the region.

AAG regional divisions and their regional journals today emphasize scholarship on their region which is the logical place for students and faculty seeking to apply methodology.

In an editorial report in the 1988 *Newsletter*, Max Barlow, the *Proceedings* Editor, complained that fewer than half of those presenting papers at the annual meeting were submitting them for publication. Nevertheless, the *Proceedings* contained about a dozen articles throughout the 1990's when a series of capable editors maintained the standards. At the beginning of the next decade, however, it became clear that NESTVAL needed a journal rather than a proceedings.

### Special Publications: *Geography in New England*

In 1988, the Society published *Geography in New England*, a collection of departmental histories, transcripts of interviews in Wes Dow's *Geographers on Film* series, and papers on the emergence and status of applied geography in New England (Harmon and Rickard 1988). Institutional histories included Yale University, Dartmouth College, Mount Holyoke College, Salem State College, Clark University and Harvard University. The New England geographers interviewed were Ella Keene, Rowland Illick, Peter Nash, George Lewis, Saul Cohen, Edward Miles and Geoffrey Martin. The book, conceived by the *Proceedings* editors and resulting from special sessions at the annual meeting, remains the sole special publication of the Society.

The book is a useful archive. The editors of *The Northeastern Geographer* and the NESTVAL Executive Committee should contemplate a companion volume: there are other departments and a new generation of geographers. Equally important, geographic information science has transformed many departments in the past two decades as did applied geography previously. These departmental evolutions need recording and evaluation.

### The Origins of *The Northeastern Geographer*

After several years of discussion, a motion to establish a regional journal to replace the *Proceedings* was passed by members present at the 2006 NESTVAL Business Meeting at Burlington, Vermont. The Society believed that a peer-reviewed journal was needed as an outlet for members' scholarship. It was also felt that a journal, rather than a proceedings, would better serve the needs of graduate students and younger faculty members still seeking tenure or promotion. By 2006, the *Proceedings* was failing to attract sufficient papers and editorial responsibilities were falling by default on the conference organizers. For example, at the Hartford meeting in 2003 participants made more than 50 presentations but eight papers and three reports were published. The program chair became temporary editor. Lack of editorial commitment and continuity was viewed as a problem in attracting quality papers and the timely publication of the *Proceedings*.

At that time, the Executive Committee and particularly Cathleen McAnneny (University of Maine-Farmington) as NESTVAL President investigated the highly regarded *Southeastern Geographer* as a model regional journal. The resulting resolution called for maintaining the

tradition of an annual publication rather than the biannual commitment of the *Southeastern Geographer*, recognizing the role of a regional journal for stimulating scholarship at the annual meeting. It called for an editor and associate editor appointed for a renewable two-year term and supported by an advisory board of their choice. Recognizing the Southeastern Division of the AAG's strong record of scholarship on their region, the resolution committed the new NESTVAL journal to support research on New England and Quebec. It would publish reviews of books on the region or by geographers in the region. The editors, and advisory board, would disseminate the journal by obtaining standing orders from libraries within the region. The call for applications suggested that the editors were expected to put their own stamp on the journal. Now we have the results of the resolution and the editors' labors in our hands.

### NESTVAL's Future Tasks

In this essay I have asserted that NESTVAL must sustain the tradition of an annual newsletter and an annual journal, now *The Northeastern Geographer*. Furthermore, the journal editors, in conjunction with the Executive Committee and prospective hosts of annual meetings, should plan a special publication on one of several topics as a book or special edition. Newsletters and session titles record NESTVAL's recent preoccupation with international education, reflecting institutional missions and AAG encouragement. Departmental provision of long and short term opportunities for student study and research abroad has often been innovative, judging from the presentations. One example is the partnership between CCSU, Bridgewater State and two Brazilian universities. Manuscripts on these programmatic innovations in the practice of geography in the region have been sparse and a special edition of *The Northeastern Geographer* would be timely.

Support from the elected NESTVAL leadership and the concern of the membership at large is essential for those editorial volunteers who assume responsibility for quality and timely publications and information. I sense that this millennium has seen a further globalization of perspective among the region's geographers who now have easy access to conferences and publications in their specialty all over the world. New leadership must strengthen the services which support geography at its grass roots in the region.

In my opinion, the discipline is no stronger overall in the region than when I arrived in 1971. A few medium sized departments, including my own, are stronger. Most of the larger and more prestigious departments have held their prominence nationally. Geography has been vulnerable, however, when partnered with other disciplines in a small or medium sized unit. The stand alone geographer always needs support. Half a dozen single geographer departments of the 1970's and 1980's no longer have the discipline as a major at their institutions. Sadly, geography has virtually disappeared from higher education in Rhode Island: geographers from the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College were prominent in NESTVAL in the 1970's and 1980's. There is now no Masters degree in geography in the three states of northern New England.

The AAG Council expects the Society to nurture geography in the region: the Councilor's one fixed responsibility is a semi-annual report on the health of geography. The NESTVAL

Executive Committee is working hard to fend off attacks on departments and to promote the discipline. Annual meetings are still well attended. Both undergraduate and graduate attendance has increased considerably, thanks to the excellent Geography Bowl, the reintroduction of student prizes and the encouragement for students to practice their professional craft. And now, with its new annual journal, NESTVAL is committing itself to promoting and showcasing the scholarship of its members and others who research this diverse and ever-changing region. The inaugural volume of *The Northeastern Geographer* is thus an important milestone in the evolution of NESTVAL. NESTVAL and the editors of *The Northeastern Geographer* are dedicated to producing a peer-reviewed journal of the highest quality. The success of this venture is also dependent upon the support and commitment of NESTVAL members and scholars devoted to the study of the Northeast and St. Lawrence Valley regions. Let's give them all our support!

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