MADISON AND CHICAGO

GEOGRAPHY AT WISCONSIN

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GEOGRAPHY existed at the University of Wisconsin as early as 1908 in the form of a well-recognized nuclear faculty within the Geology Department. Even over a century ago, in the decade of the 1860s, a few courses in geography, likely taught by nonprofessionals, were listed in the university catalogs. But during the two decades following, geography appears to have become moribund, for the bulletins cease to mention it.

THE PRE-1920 PERIOD

Geography in more durable form emerged once more in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and in two unlike academic environments. One of these sproutings, and the more lasting one, for from it the present Department of Geography can trace its direct lineage, was nurtured in what was then called the Department of Geology, Mineralogy, and Petrology. The second and more ephemeral one had its beginnings in the School of Economics, Political Science, and History, from which a little later the School of Commerce evolved.

It appears rather certain that in the academic year 1891–1892, Rollin D. Salisbury offered the first professionally taught geography course at the University of Wisconsin, although it was not so titled. According to the university catalog for that year, Salisbury gave a beginning year course, consisting of three terms, in what was labeled General Geology. The catalog description of the first term’s content read: “The first term of the year will be devoted mainly to a study of the effects produced by the various agencies now in operation upon the surface of the earth, special prominence being given to the evolution and classification of geographic forms.” Note especially the choice of the word “geographic,” and also the emphasis upon land-surface form.

In the same university catalog for 1891–92 under the heading “Graduate Courses in Geology,” one reads that work in “general and geographic geology” was offered by Professor Salisbury. The label “geographic geology” seems a rather appropriate name for a course in physical geography offered within the Geology Department. So it may be claimed with some confidence that professional geography at Wisconsin had its inception on the occasion of Rollin D. Salisbury’s brief tenure nearly nine decades ago. As an aside it may be mentioned that his classes met in the then new Science Hall, a distinguished old building which continues to house the present Geography Department. It was Wisconsin’s president, the renowned geologist Thomas C. Chamberlain, who brought Salisbury, his former student, to Wisconsin. It was Chamberlain also who caused his protege’s subsequent early departure as well. In 1892 Chamberlain resigned his presidency at Wisconsin to become head of the newly created Department of Geology at the University of Chicago, and he persuaded young Salisbury to follow him there in 1893. Significantly, at Chicago Salisbury’s official title was Professor of Geographic Geology. It was a great misfortune that Rollin D. Salisbury could not have been retained at Wisconsin, for he had remarkable talents as teacher, scholar, and administrator. After serving as “geographic geologist” for nearly a decade in Chamberlain’s newly created Department of Geology, upon the establishment of a separate Department of Geography at Chicago in 1902–1903, Salisbury became its administrative head. Wisconsin’s loss was Chicago’s gain.

Still, Salisbury’s very brief tenure at Wisconsin appears to have had lasting effects, for geography has continued to prevail ever since then. The year following Salisbury’s departure Charles R. Van Hise (later to become university president), a distinguished hard-rock geologist, took over the course in general geology and he promptly rewrote its catalog description to read as follows: “The geological forces and the work they accomplish; the geography of the continents, the effects of land relief, water areas, and rivers upon the distribution


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of people; rocks and their origins and secondary structures." To be sure, it seems like an odd melange of geology and geography, but indubitably the geographic element was prominent; Salisbury's previous insertion of some geography was being perpetuated. In 1895–96 the course was further modified, with two-fifths of the class hours being devoted to "the physiography of the United States, each province being treated in reference to its development and its relation to population." This was straight physical geography. The course content remained the same until Nevin Fenneman, a bona fide geographer, was added to the geology staff in 1903 as a full professor. Thus, the modest amount of physical geography introduced by Salisbury was maintained by the geologists over about a decade of time, even with no geographer present. During this period several visiting professors, among them William Morris Davis of Harvard and Nevin Fenneman, were brought in to offer courses in physical geography or physiography during summer sessions. Clearly, the Wisconsin geologists were interested in maintaining at least a modest amount of instruction in geography.

Fenneman's graduate training was with Chamberlain and Salisbury at Chicago where he was classified as a geology major. But he writes: "I came to this school by way of geography. Geography was my calling and my goal." This new addition to the Wisconsin geology staff was exceptional among his contemporaries in geography in that he was no staunch environmentalist. On the contrary, he asserted that the task of geography was to grasp the content and individuality of the earth's regions. He emphasized area study. Following this line of thinking, Fenneman's overriding professional interest was in regional landform physiography, and the crowning achievement of his life's work was the monumental two volume synthesis of the regional terrain geography of the United States.

With the addition of Fenneman as a full professor to the geology faculty in 1903 (the year C. K. Leith was made chairman of geology), geography, albeit mainly physical geography, became firmly established at Wisconsin. Fenneman proclaimed himself a geographer and frankly labeled his courses Physical Geography and Physiography, a signal that the geologists were willing to accept geography as an authentic branch of their earth science. Fenneman's tenure at Wisconsin, like Salisbury's before him, was brief, for after only four years of service he left in 1907 to head up a new Department of Geology and Geography at the University of Cincinnati. Thus did early geography at Wisconsin suffer a second serious personnel loss, for in Fenneman was a remarkable teacher and an able scientist. It is one of my cherished memories to have known Nevin Fenneman, if only briefly, in his later years.

The loss of Fenneman was made somewhat less serious by two offsetting factors. First, there was already in the department a young instructor by the name of Lawrence Martin, an understudy of Fenneman's, who was well qualified to take over the senior professor's courses. And second, the department moved quickly to add a new assistant professor, R. H. Whitbeck, to the geology roster. Martin must have performed well for he was promptly promoted to the rank of assistant professor, also. He not only taught most of Fenneman's courses, but added some of his own as well. Martin's main contribution to his science during approximately one decade of tenure at Wisconsin consisted of a number of scholarly papers on the topic of Alaskan glaciers. The field work and writing associated with this comprehensive glacial study was done in collaboration with his mentor, Professor Ralph Tarr of Cornell University. Their work culminated in the scholarly volume, Alaskan Glacial Studies. Martin probably was more famous locally for his excellent and much used book, Physical Geography of Wisconsin, published in 1916 by the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey.

In the late 1890s, the School of Economics, Political Science, and History began to offer a few courses in commercial geography. These offerings were dropped after the appointment of Whitbeck to the geology faculty in 1908–09, ending the brief period of dual geography development. Henceforth there was to be but one geographic stem and that one, for the time being, conjoined with the earth sciences.

During the second decade of the century, Whitbeck rose in rank from assistant professor to professor and Lawrence Martin resigned in 1917 to engage in government work in Washington, D.C. This loss was serious, for Martin was not only a good teacher but also a scholar with a national reputation. In 1919 Martin
was replaced by Armin K. Lobeck, a physiographer with a Ph.D. from Columbia.

I enrolled as an advanced undergraduate at Wisconsin in the fall of 1919 with the intention of majoring in geography. At that time, university geography in the United States had a dual focus: 1) as an earth science, often called physiography, it emphasized terrain morphology and genesis, but not uncommonly, under the rubric of physical geography, also included some treatment of other features of the physical earth; and 2) as a social science it was mainly concerned with man-land relationships, or environmental influence.

Whitbeck was not even mildly tainted by such deviate concepts as areal differentiation and terrestial distributions; he remained an environmental purist to the end. Vernor Finch, next in seniority, may have at that time still adhered in a mild way to the man-land relationship school of thought, although as co-author of Geography of the World's Agriculture the concepts of location and terrestrial distributions so prominent in that publication must have loomed large with him. Finch, who had arrived at Wisconsin in 1911, began as a teaching assistant, earned a Ph.D., and by the end of the decade was a durable member of the geography staff, with the rank of associate professor. Lobeck, a physiographer, scarcely bothered himself about the content of geography.

Leith, the department chairman and a protege of the recently deceased President Van Hise, was very much a "head" and recognized no peer. Each week the entire departmental staff, including teaching assistants, met for a catered luncheon in Science Hall. This was scarcely an occasion for transacting departmental business; rather it was in the nature of a general talkfest. Leith always sat at the head of the table, and tended to direct the discussion, much of it nonprofessional in character.

The limited number of geography graduate students, most of them teaching assistants, formed a congenial and, at times, stimulating professional group. I joined this group in 1920-21 at a salary of $1000 for the academic year. No subsequent academic appointment ever gave me more pleasure. We were all appreciative of our appointments as teaching assistants, partly because of the valuable experience it provided, but also because of what it probably betokened in terms of a recommendation for a professorial position in the near future. Adversary relationships between teaching assistants and senior faculty nowise existed. Frequent departmental picnics, field excursions, and winter cookouts, together with evening parties at the Finch, Lobeck, Leith, and Twenhotel homes, made for good group spirit. Climax of the school year was the occasion, in May, when we took several hundred physical geography students by train on an all-day field trip to the Devils Lake region.

THE 1920s

Throughout the first half of the 1920s a three-man senior staff—Whitbeck, Finch, and Lobeck—directed the work in geography, although it was Finch on whom the graduate group mainly depended for instruction, direction, and inspiration. Staff expansion occurred in the latter part of the 1920s when John W. Frey and myself, both of whom had served several years as assistants and instructors, were advanced to the rank of assistant professor.

R. H. Whitbeck attended Genesee Normal School and was graduated from Cornell University in 1901 with a major in geography-geology under the distinguished physiographer, Ralph Tarr. Whitbeck spent an additional year as a graduate assistant at Cornell, but the records do not indicate that he earned a graduate degree. Whitbeck spent a total of fourteen years teaching in secondary and normal schools, an experience that left an indelible imprint on his later professional work, for the main thrust of his writing and publication was the preparation of geographic materials for high school and normal school teachers. It is not clear why Whitbeck, approaching forty at the time and lacking advanced degrees and scholarly publications, was chosen to head up the expanding work in geography at Wisconsin; certainly his attributes were not those of his predecessors, Salisbury and Fenneman. In retrospect, it seems likely that he was selected for the Wisconsin position mainly because of his dedication to the teaching of geography, and consequently to the needs of the public school teachers in the state. He had the reputation of being an interesting teacher, if not a very exciting one. He was popular with undergraduates and teachers, but less so with advanced students.

Vernor C. Finch was a graduate of Kalamazoo College and had taken two years of ad-
advanced work in geography at the University of Chicago before coming to Wisconsin in 1911. Finch was the first geography Ph.D. (1916) granted at the University of Wisconsin. As a college teacher Finch had many assets and also a few liabilities. His courses and lectures were meticulously organized and full of substance. His performance was outstanding in seminars and occasional advanced courses. But Finch's lectures lacked any embellishments (except for slides) and this together with his somewhat monotonous delivery caused many students in elementary courses to find him dull.

As a geography craftsman Finch was genuinely respected by his American colleagues, even though his professional publications were not abundant. He got off to a good and early start, even while still an instructor, with his publication (O. E. Baker, coauthor) in 1917 of Geography of the World's Agriculture. This combination text and atlas was enthusiastically received, and it seemed to augur well for a long and distinguished scholarly career for Finch. Regrettably, these expectations did not materialize to the degree anticipated. It is especially to be regretted that his two main fields of teaching specialization, agricultural geography and North America, did not lead to scholarly volumes. A number of explanations might be suggested; none are completely convincing. In my judgement, one important causative factor was that over a period of eighteen years he allowed the burdens of the department chairmanship to consume too much of his time and energy that, some would say, might have been better spent in scholarly research and writing.

Personally, I owe a great deal to Vernon Finch. It was he who, early in my graduate work, took occasion to point out the department's need for more course offerings in the field of climatology, and suggested that I might be wise to go to Harvard for a year of training with the eminent climatologist, Robert de Courcy Ward. I acted on his suggestion and subsequently was asked to develop courses in climatology at Wisconsin. Later, it was Finch who casually mentioned to me the department's need for courses in East Asia, and simultaneously brought to my attention the newly established Guggenheim Fellowships which I might apply for in order to study in that region. Again, I followed his tip, and supported by a Guggenheim did a year of study in Japan and China, with the result that I had a second anchor at Wisconsin.

Armin K. Lobeck, as a replacement for Lawrence Martin, joined the Wisconsin geology staff in 1919, and remained just a decade. His graduate training was at Columbia University, mainly under the direction of the distinguished geomorphologist, Douglas Johnson. Lobeck's particular fame as a landform physiographer lay in his ability to meld his lectures and writing with the craftsmanship of a landscape artist constructing three-dimensional physiographic diagrams and sketches. I continue to look back on his year course, Physiography of the United States, as one of the most interesting and enlightening ever taken, and a great boon to my travels in this country. It was while at Wisconsin that Lobeck became famous for his physiographic diagrams of the several continents and their interpretive texts. To distribute these publications he organized the Wisconsin Geographical Press which was conceived and wholly owned by him. Lobeck was more interested in preparing these highly useful teaching materials than he was in scholarly research and writing in geomorphology. It is not surprising therefore that he was willing to return to Columbia in 1929 when he was offered the position there of overseeing the instructional work in the large elementary courses in geology.

1930–1945

Geography severed its administrative relationship with geology and became an autonomous department in 1928–29. As a new assistant professor in the department, I was not included in the deliberations leading to the establishment of an autonomous geography department, with Finch as its chairman. I am still uncertain, therefore, as to how the levers of power were operated to gain the acquiescence of geology to the divorce that took place. Nor am I aware of why Whitbeck, the senior geographer, was passed over in the appointment of a chairman. Rumor had it that the process of separation was instigated when Finch was invited to join the geography faculty at the University of Chicago and, as bait to hold him at Wisconsin, there was proposed a promotion in rank and a separate Department of Geography with him as chairman. At any rate, the split was made, Finch was promoted, and he was also made chairman of the new department.
One of the terms agreed upon was that geology would retain physiography and geomorphology. After Lobeck's departure, the department had no specialist in landform geography, although by this time several courses in climatology had been developed within the department. Early in the decade of the 1930s we became conscious of rumbles from some of the other science departments expressing some doubts as to whether our large elementary course in physical geography should any longer be included within the group of courses that satisfied the university's science requirement. We suspected that geology might be back of this attack on the scientific merits of our elementary physical geography course. The rumored criticism was worrisome to the geographers, especially since our elementary physical geography was so much of a bread-and-butter course. At the same time we recognized we were somewhat vulnerable to the criticism because we no longer had an authentic landform physiographer on our staff, and because the content and quality of the then-available textbooks in physical geography were unsatisfactory. A rigorous new text, involving both description and genesis of the earth's physical environments, would do much to strengthen our position vis-a-vis the other sciences.

Finch and I both taught the elementary physical geography course and came to the conclusion that the textbook deficiency required prompt attention. In spite of long experience in teaching physical geography, neither of us had a yen to write the needed textbook; we both had in progress other projects with greater appeal. We tried to inveigle one or more of our colleagues to undertake the task, but to no avail. Eventually we concluded that the task was ours, so we laid aside other projects and went to work.

By 1934–35 the manuscript began to take shape and we decided to try it out for a year in our own classes. Edwards Brothers of Ann Arbor set it up in a soft cover, typescript form in 1935. The testing period proved useful, and certain changes and modifications in the manuscript resulted. The finished book, The Elements of Geography, was finally off the press in 1936 with McGraw-Hill as publisher. Finch, the senior author, was consulting editor of the McGraw-Hill Series in Geography. Our close working relationship in producing the book only added to my respect for Vernor Finch.

After Finch's elevation to chairman he acted promptly to upgrade the staff by adding two, new assistant professors, J. Russell Whitaker and Loyal Durand, Jr. The long and serious economic depression, followed by World War II, must have made Finch's eighteen years as chairman a most discouraging and frustrating period in which to pilot a new department. One bright spot was the occasion of granting an honorary Doctor of Law degree to Isaiah Bowman in 1936. Another was our success in bringing to Wisconsin in 1937–38 Dr. Wilhelm Credner of Munich, Germany, as a Carl Schurz Visiting Professor. He was an invigorating tonic to our staff as he discussed with us the current geographic developments in continental Europe where our science had recently made such rapid strides. His seminar, attended by faculty and graduate students alike, was a place of animated discussion. Credner's total effect was to raise the sights of our staff in terms of research.

Early in the 1940s we suffered a serious loss in the resignation of J. Russell Whitaker, but Finch moved rapidly to fill this gap and we were fortunate in adding Richard Hartsorne to the faculty. Hartsorne and Henry Sterling (the latter holding the rank of instructor) left for war duties in Washington, D.C., and continued on leave for four years. Those of us who elected to remain in Madison were deeply engaged in administering war programs and teaching men in uniform. Graduate work languished, but we were fortunate in having with us in this hectic period the distinguished Professor Leo Waibel from the University of Bonn. Regrettably, Waibel was in our midst at a time when, due to wartime disruptions and the presence of few high quality graduate students, we were not able to make as effective use of his unusual geographic talents as we might have.

POST-1945

A greatly enlarged student enrollment following promptly upon the war's ending stimulated a rapid rebuilding of the geography staff and an expansion of the roster of courses. Finch, who had guided the destinies of geography at Wisconsin for nearly two decades, and who had lately borne the brunt of departmental dislocations during the war years, asked to be relieved of chairmanship duties; his health had begun to fail. The lot fell on me. Rebuilding
the staff began promptly with the return of Hartshorne and Sterling from wartime assignments. Shortly thereafter four new staff members were added: Arch Gerlach as associate professor and Arthur Robinson, Clarence Olmstead, and Kirk Stone as assistant professors. Robinson’s attachment to the staff foretold a more extensive development of cartography at Wisconsin, an aspect of geography to which Finch had given modest attention in the prewar years.

During the decade of the 1950s staff numbers continued to expand reaching a total of about a dozen by the close of the period. Among the new recruits were Andrew Clark in historical geography, John Alexander in economic geography, and Edwin Hammond, a specialist in terrain analysis within the general field of physical geography.

More important perhaps than the growth in numbers of the geography faculty were other types of departmental changes, among them the upgrading of graduate work, the expansion in numbers of graduate students, and the greater emphasis placed on faculty research and publication. The increased stature of geography at Wisconsin was recognized by the Kenistone Study of 1957 which purported to rank university graduate departments and their faculties. By this study Wisconsin’s geography department ranked first in the country, followed by Chicago and California-Berkeley. All of this expansion and change within the department during the late 1940s and 1950s, both in quantity and quality, occurred during the tenures of four chairmen, beginning with Trewartha, followed by Hartshorne and Robinson, and ending with Clark.¹

¹ Space is lacking in this essay to trace in detail the history of the Wisconsin geography department over the last few decades. A more complete treatment of the subject is to be found in a pamphlet distributed on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of an autonomous Geography Department at the University of Wisconsin—Madison.

GEOGRAPHY AT CHICAGO IN THE 1930s AND 1940s*  
Chauncy D. Harris

The Department of Geography of the University of Chicago was established in 1903 as the first graduate department of geography in a university in the United States.¹ The core


These geographers participated extensively in activities of the Association of American Geographers. Barrows was president in 1922; Colby was secretary 1923–1929 and president in 1935; Jones served on the Council 1924–1926; Platt was treasurer 1929–1934, president in 1945, and editor of the Annals, 1961–1964; and Taylor was president in 1941. The original faculty in 1903 consisted of two members, Rollin D. Salisbury and J. Paul Goode. Salisbury, who had come from the University of Wisconsin, knew something of European figures in geography at Chicago, Henry C. Cowles (plant ecology) served as President of the Association of American Geographers in 1910, Rollin D. Salisbury in 1912, Ellen Churchill Semple in 1921, Harlan H. Barrows in 1922, J. Paul Goode in 1926, and Wallace W. Atwood (geology) in 1934.