GEOGRAPHY IN THE SOUTH

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I was offered a position on the faculty of the University of Georgia in 1946 by the president of the university, Dr. Harmon W. Caldwell. Therein lies a tale. During the war years the University of Georgia—as did many institutions—contracted with the Army to train officer cadets and some other military personnel. An extended general geography course based on Finch and Trewartha’s Introduction to Geography was part of the Army cadet program. Standardized tests for the course were prepared in Washington, administered on the several campuses, then returned to Washington for grading. At the onset of the war, the Georgia faculty contained one geographer, the gentlemanly E. Scott Sell, whose only graduate degree was in an agricultural subfield. Historians, physicists, English professors, sociologists, and some others were shifted from their departments (where enrollments were low) to staff the Army geography course, and Mr. Sell did what he could to advise and lead this coterie. Even so, the student performances under the Army’s standardized testing amounted to a succession of disasters that Washington brought to President Caldwell’s personal attention. The nongeographers could not, or at least did not, teach basic geography effectively.

A distinguished graduate of Harvard, a scholar by any measure, and also a native Georgian, Caldwell was deeply embarrassed. He and his two key deans exploited their many contacts in other universities and in wartime Washington to “background” themselves regarding this discipline in which their institution was performing poorly. The wartime contributions of Washington geographers made a distinctly favorable impression on them. Caldwell himself engaged in some reading, and when I first met him he knew something of the works of Mackinder, Davis, Bowman, Huntington, and J. Russell Smith. Smith in particular had impressed him. (Fortunately for me, he also knew of Wallace W. Atwood and the Clark Graduate School of Geography.) The result from all this was an administrative decision to create a department of geography that would not be just an adjunct to teacher training but would be a full-fledged academic entity. It was this decision that led to my appointment. I did not fully realize the importance of the administrative commitment to development of geography until I had observed the state of the discipline in other institutions where no such commitment existed.

At that time the University of Georgia had little in the way of graduate education, nor did it compare at the undergraduate level with the leading southern universities of the time: Vanderbilt, Duke, North Carolina, and Tulane. Pre-war, it had been poorly funded. For geography there were virtually no physical facilities (one poorly equipped classroom), library holdings were modest, and a curriculum did not exist. A few service courses, teacher-training oriented, were available as electives in several programs and were known to the faculty as havens for football players and other jocks. The faculty leadership (though generous enough on a personal basis) had little feel or respect for geography as a discipline and was disturbed by the commitment to the field made by its progressive president; it meant funds directed into a channel other than the traditional ones.

The situation was virtually “zero” but—with the administrative commitment, and an institution-wide program for expansion of research and graduate training underway—I felt it spelled “Opportunity” with a capital “O” for a young man. Any qualitatively decent departmental development was bound to look good when compared to “zero”! Also, I had developed a continuing interest in the South during my student days at the University of Missouri as a consequence of a directed research problem plus a field session in the Missouri “panhandle” section of the alluvial Mississippi valley required by my mentor, Sam T. Bratton. In the late 1930s, the panhandle was pure cotton tenant plantation country and about as “southern” an area as there was. The panhandle junket made a lasting impression on a certain college senior reared in and until then familiar only with the Great Plains and central Missouri. Geographic research on the South during the 1930s and early 1940s had been minimal, but Georgia clearly was prepared to supply financial support for faculty research: again, opportunity.
It was, then, an uneven background from which I began to view geography in the South. I had developed serious reservations about deterministically slanted work and was leaning more and more toward process-oriented study that was topically organized in a historical format. While "at home" in field situations and confident in the classroom, I was unsure about a lot of things (a condition I did my best to conceal) and solicited advice from Jones, Finch, Hartshorne, Sauer, Van Valkenburg, and later Glenn Trewartha, in developing the Georgia department.

In 1947 the condition of academic geography in the South was a modest one, but the undergirdings of many contemporary departments were in place; Georgia had lagged and its situation was not representative.¹ First, there were teacher training-oriented programs—frequently operated by just one person—in a rather large number of state colleges. These included Mississippi State College for Women, Montevallo [Ala.] College for Women, Georgia Women's College, Florida State College for Women (which became Florida State University), North Carolina College for Women at Greensboro, all of the Tennessee state teachers colleges (Memphis State, Austin Peay, Middle Tennessee State at Murfreesboro, East Tennessee State), Eastern Kentucky at Richmond, Delta State and University of Southern Mississippi, Livingston and Troy State in Alabama, and—as I recall—all of the state teachers colleges in both North Carolina and Louisiana. Miami University had a small program whose fulcrum was Luella Dambaugh. Birmingham-Southern offered both service courses and a major under Allen Tower. Perhaps the most widely known teacher-oriented institution was George Peabody College in Nashville, where J. Russell Whitaker recently had assumed the leadership role in the graduate program, leading to the Ed.D., developed earlier by A. E. Parkins. Among the black colleges, apparently only Tennessee A. and I. at Nashville had developed a program, and there the "legend" of Mazie Tyson—its kingpin for decades—lives on today.

Few of these institutions except Peabody offered majors in the discipline. In general, they were at about the same stage in the development of geography that their sister teachers colleges in Middle Western and Great Plains states had reached some fifteen years earlier. That should not be surprising. In a developmental sense, nearly all aspects of these colleges—not merely geography—were a decade or more behind their counterparts in nonsouthern regions. Most of these institutions were too small to achieve the "critical mass" in size and funding to support geography or several other fields at departmental levels.

In a second group of institutions there were combined geology-geography departments in which the geography component was the junior partner. These were state or land-grant universities, and included Tennessee, North Carolina, Mississippi State, Kentucky, and South Carolina. All of these institutions offered an undergraduate major in geography by 1950 (and, subsequently, graduate programs), and today the discipline has independent departmental status in all but Mississippi State. In some, departmental status came quickly after World War II, as at Kentucky under J. R. Schwendeman's leadership, but in other instances the divorce from geology has been more recent. At the University of Tennessee, for example, the senior professor from 1944 until 1970 was Loyal Durand who was not interested in separate departmental status and did little to obtain it. It was the younger Tennessee geographers whose efforts led to establishment of the present department in 1968–69 and to its rapid growth between 1967 and 1972.

There was a third group of southern institutions in 1947; those that didn't fit either of the foregoing two categories. These consisted of the University of Mississippi ("Ole Miss"), Louisiana State University, and the Universities of Virginia, Florida, Alabama, and Georgia. No geography program was then offered at "Ole Miss," to my knowledge never has been, and still is not. At Virginia, Sidman Poole had come from wartime Washington to generate a department, and he had managed to bring Wayne Wallace with him. By about 1950 the staff consisted of five or six, some of whom retained their Washington connections. Poole's health failed before the department reached his objectives and thereafter it followed an uncertain course. Since the late 1960s it has become primarily a department of environmental sciences in which conventional geo-

¹To my knowledge, I was the first Ph.D. in geography ever employed in Georgia in any state, Federal, local or private agency, or company.
graphical analysis obtains a secondary role. Florida, on the other hand, had developed a department during the 1930s. On one of his junkets into the South, Wallace Atwood, Sr. had contacted the Florida administrators and sold them the notion of establishing a department; his elder son, Rollin Salisbury Atwood, headed that program and recruited Sigismond Diettrich to the Florida faculty. Rollin Atwood left Florida during World War II and Diettrich headed the department as it expanded into graduate work in the postwar years. A principal figure in Florida’s postwar development as a graduate center was Raymond Crist, whose Latin American orientation provided an important link between geography and the university’s Center for Latin American Studies, headed by A. C. Wilgus.

During the pre-World War II decade at the University of Alabama courses in economic geography were offered as adjuncts to business administration, and several young geographers rotated in-and-out of the faculty on one- and two-year appointments. G. Eitel Pearcy was one of these. Following the war geography became part of a combined department with geology, and an effective “equal-partner” relationship has continued to the present. At the University of Georgia in 1947 the development of an undergraduate program had just begun.

Louisiana State University, in contrast, had what I thought was the most promising program in the South at the time. Fred B. Kniffen and Richard Joel Russell, the two towering figures in the LSU department during the three subsequent decades, already were established and so were the two departmental foci: physical and cultural geography. The department had both the complementarity and the scholarly maturity in its faculty to challenge superior graduate students, a condition that other southern departments did not equal for some time.

The only major private institution with a geographer on its faculty in 1947 was Duke, where Ben F. Lemert served in the economics department. Among the smaller private institutions, prestigious little Davidson College had the services of James Reid. Upon the death of Lemert and the retirement of Reid, neither was replaced. Richard Tuthill, Duke’s registrar and a geographer, has kept the discipline alive on his campus but otherwise geography and geographers have made no postwar contributions through the campuses of the principal private institutions in the South. Atlanta University, the largest complex of privately funded black-oriented institutions anywhere, has had the services of a few individual geographers on short-term appointments since 1947, but never has supported a permanent appointee. The failure to develop “leadership” professorships in the principal private institutions has been a handicap to all who have worked to expand the discipline in the region.

I have been told several times that the postwar rise of the Georgia department had a powerful effect upon the growth of geography in the South, and elsewhere, because we were used as a model to win support for the discipline from administrators in other institutions. Such statements are nice to hear, and those of us at Georgia like to think we have had some beneficial effects elsewhere. But geography was more broadly established across the South at the close of World War II than has been generally realized even though its bases were modest at the individual institutional level. The discipline was bound to expand, to increase its stature, as the region discarded its shackles of the post-Civil War Reconstruction and tenancy.

2 Richard Joel Russell not only generated the Department of Geography and Anthropology but also the School of Geosciences. He served two extended tours as dean of the LSU Graduate School. He was highly regarded in the councils of graduate deans not only in the South but across the nation, a condition which helped many geography departments both directly and indirectly as they expanded during the postwar decades. Russell also was a principal figure in the development of the Coastal Research Institute at LSU.

3 During the 1950s the Georgia department was operating at the absolute capacity of its physical facility, then two floors of a 1930 WPA-era structure that had been remodeled for us. We could not expand faculty for want of office and lab space in which they could work. We limited M.A. candidates to about ten in residence because of space constraints and we refused to undertake a Ph.D. program because space limited our faculty as well as our facilities. The administrative response came in 1957 in the form of a charge to design a new building specifically for geography and geology, accompanied by the assurance of “carte blanche” funding. We moved into the new facility in 1960, rapidly expanded the faculty, and initiated the Ph.D. program in 1961. Few groups of geographers have had the opportunity to develop physical facilities to fit their needs from the ground up. This building has been examined repeatedly by geographers from other campuses who were engaged in facilities renovations or construction.
era and began the economic transformation which has brought it to its current forward-looking state. Colleges and universities across the nation experienced enormous enrollment expansions during the 1950s and '60s, which led to more positions for academic geographers everywhere. But in the South, where the proportion of college-age population enrolled in colleges and universities had been the nation's smallest in prewar days, the increases in postwar enrollments have been phenomenal. They have been fueled not only by a burgeoning population but also by the remarkable increases in per capita incomes—hence increases in the numbers who could and would attend college.

In an oversimplified sense, as the South's economic conditions have approached national norms, its academic institutions also have expanded greatly and now approximate those of other principal regions in both quantitative and qualitative measures, all much to the benefit of academic geography.

Four forces that have influenced geography greatly in the region have been, for me, sources of genuine excitement during the past quarter-century. These are: 1) the rise of the new urban-area universities; 2) the development of the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers; 3) the expansion of scholarly work, which has transformed académie's view of geography from that of a teacher-training activity to that of a full-fledged academic entity; and 4) the growth of geography in nonacademic pursuits.

In the 1930s, the South's population was about seventy per cent rural; today it is approximately seventy per cent urban, and roughly twenty-five of the remaining thirty per cent is rural nonfarm that is urban-oriented for both employment and services. Burgeoning metropolitan populations have led to major expansions of older urban-sited universities, such as the University of Louisville, Miami University, and Memphis State, and concomitant growth in geography faculties. But state governments have been compelled to create new institutions in many urban centers to meet the demand for local college facilities. The University of South Florida, Florida Atlantic University (heavily committed to advanced-level instruction), LSU at New Orleans, the University of South Alabama in Mobile, Georgia State University in Atlanta, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte are relatively new institutions and each contains an active department of geography. The University of Jacksonville is another. Newest of all is George Mason University in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., where Alice Andrews has been pivotal in the growth of a five-person staff (since 1972) within a department of Public Affairs. Some institutions outside metropolitan areas also have responded to the urbanizing influence, and growth generally, by the creation of new departments and expansion of older ones. Charles Goode has been the kingpin in the development of a new department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University ("VPI"). East Carolina College became East Carolina University under the leadership of an aggressive and politically astute president who viewed geography as pivotal; today the foundation established in the 1930s by Parnell W. Picklesimer at East Carolina supports a flourishing department. The decision by Mississippi's leadership not to place a principal state institution in either Jackson or one of its Gulf Coast cities has benefited the University of Southern Mississippi, at Hattiesburg, where William Roberts and his energetic young colleagues committed their program to applied work about a decade ago.

In many respects the Southeastern Division is unique among the regional divisions within

4 In the early 1950s, Atlanta Evening College became the Atlanta College of the University System of Georgia. When the University System's Regents were told that their Atlanta College did not meet accreditation standards, they placed it under the administration of the University of Georgia. This stratagem resolved the accreditation crisis temporarily, but it also placed each subject-area in the Atlanta unit under the administration of the appropriate department head on the home campus of the University, in Athens. Thus I have the peculiar distinction of having initiated both geography and geology departments at both the University and at Georgia State, a compounded set of burdens I would wish on no one. Carl Sauer provided invaluable assistance; he recommended to us both Reese Walker and H. J. Walker for the Atlanta operation. The teaching excellence and personal brilliance of these dedicated young men was the talk of the Atlanta campus in short order. When the Atlanta unit reached the level where it could be separated from the University and constituted as Georgia State, the two Walkers had established an enduring foundation for the present department.

5 The University of Southern Mississippi was established in 1914, primarily as a teacher training institution, and its initial faculty organization included a position for a geographer. To the knowledge of everyone I have asked, Southern Mississippi was the first
the Association of American Geographers. It is quite active; the activity level may be equalled, but not exceeded, at times only by the Pacific Coast geographers. Through its by-laws it supports a network of state-by-state elected representatives to its governing Council, and it has provided an umbrella under which several state-wide associations of geographers have developed (notably in Florida, Mississippi, and North Carolina). Its annual meetings consistently have produced higher proportions of membership in attendance, we are told, than in any of the Divisions. It consistently draws the participation of geographers from outside the Division. The bulk of each meeting has consisted of substantive scholarly presentations which are on the program only after they have been submitted to a carefully ordered process that screens for quality. The Division has encouraged student participation since the late 1950s and each year has awarded prizes for the best scholarly presentations by students. Students attend in numbers. Special sessions that treat problems of particular interest to the membership have comprised the remainder of most programs; in recent years these have dealt with the problems geographers face in small colleges, high school teaching of the subject and teacher preparation, opportunities for and employment of geographers in state and Federal agencies, and other topics. One session traditionally has been devoted to papers sponsored by the Southern Studies Committee of the Division. Since at least the early 1950s the quality of presentations at Southeastern Division meetings has equalled or exceeded the general professional quality of national Association meetings. This is not my opinion alone but one that is shared by most of the older members of the Division, and it has been underscored repeatedly by visitors from the other Divisions who have said the same thing.

Boundaries and geographers being what they are, that the Southeastern Division has had a boundary problem should be no surprise: as the national Association has it constructed, Louisiana and Arkansas are not in the Division. After several protests fell on deaf ears at the national level in the early 1950s, the Division decided it would simply ignore the national Association’s silly boundary and would include the Arkansans and Louisianans in Divisional matters in all possible ways. The Louisianans have been particularly responsive. The Division is the opposite of secessionist; it is progressively expansionist through a gentle process resembling osmosis.

About 1949 the Division membership began to call for some means of reproducing papers presented at its meetings. The organization’s response was the annual Memorandum Folio
of the Southeastern Division, of which some thirteen volumes were produced. Each volume contained the text of each study accepted for presentation, the Secretary's and Treasurer's reports, and the minutes of the annual meetings. The host department for each meeting was responsible for duplication and distribution of each volume. By the late 1950s the Division believed it contained within its membership a base of scholarly endeavor sufficiently broadly distributed to warrant establishment of its own journal and, in 1961, the first issue of The Southeastern Geographer appeared. Although devoted primarily to publication of research treating the South, it frequently has contained articles dealing with nonsouthern subjects. During the 1970s it has been published biannually.

I suppose that, over the years, the most striking sessions of the Southeastern Division were those in which Roland Harper presented papers. Octogenarian though he was, and feeble of voice, his analyses were crystal-clear. When he spoke the session was crowded, many were standing, and one could have heard a pin drop. Without a doubt Harper had the greatest store of field-derived knowledge of the Southeast that any one person has even obtained, and this knowledge enabled him to produce "then and now" comparisons that were invaluable.8

The growth of scholarly work among geographers in the South has been, in my opinion, one principal "spin-off" from the Southeastern Division's continued emphasis on research presentations in its annual meetings. Perhaps of equal importance has been the development of the principal Ph.D.-level departments, whose research emphasis has had something of a "trickle-effect" throughout the region.9 The successes of individuals, and departments of all sizes, in obtaining Federal and state funding for research endeavors ranging from off-shore boundary studies to land utilization assessments based on remote-sensed imagery to transportation development analyses—and many others—have had a salubrious effect on academic colleagues and administrators.

**CONCLUSION**

During 1947–50, when the Georgia department was getting underway, I corresponded with Carl Sauer, soliciting advice. In one letter Sauer viewed the World War II contributions of geographers as outstanding and predicted a postwar boom for the discipline. He was not, however, altogether optimistic. He said that, while many customers would come to our counter to obtain performance of quality, our shelves were stocked mostly with mundane goods, that quality performance we had in only a modest number of packages, and that we were therefore in danger of defeating ourselves by misrepresenting our available stock of goods. (I have paraphrased slightly.) I have never forgotten that letter. Its central thought is appropriate in 1979. While we do vastly better today in the preparation of our students than was done thirty years ago, what measure of satisfaction can be obtained from that? Rather little, I think. The critical question is how well are we insuring the quality of preparation of the next generation of geographers, be they students in a southern institution or wherever.

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8 Only a few libraries have complete files of the Memorandum Folia and back issues do not exist, to my knowledge. The founding editor of The Southeastern Geographer was James A. Shear, University of Georgia. He was succeeded by Lillian Worley, University of Tennessee, who suffered a tragic accident (from which she did not recover) before her first issue appeared. Richard Lonsdale, University of North Carolina, then assumed the editorship and was succeeded by Stephen Birdsall, also of North Carolina. The present editor is Sidney Jumper, University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

9 Roland Harper was a native of Maine who was initially trained in botany. He came to the South in pre-World War II days to conduct field-based geographical surveys and was, at various times, employed for that purpose by the Geological Surveys of Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama. Upon his death Harper left a huge collection of materials, dealing principally with the South, in his office in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Fortunately the contributions of this unusual man will not molder in the archives; Eugene Wilson of the University of South Alabama is at work on the Harper collection currently.

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9 These are the departments at the universities of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and at Louisiana State University.