



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Welcome to the 2016 Contour Lines newsletter intended for the Alumni of the Department of Geography at York University. In this issue, I hope you will enjoy reading about the activities of your alumni, the York Geography and the contributions shared by students, faculty and fellow alumni.

Let me start by saying, we have been rebranded to “YUGAN”. It stands for York University Geography Alumni Network. The Office of Advancement at York University has changed the reference from alumni “association” to “network” for all its chapters; resulting in our name change.

We continue to be one of the most active chapters at York University. Thanks to the continued efforts and commitment of our Executive team along with our alumni ambassadors and York Geography.

The highpoints in 2015 can be seen as fair reflection of the direction of our network. Last year, the YGAA’s (now YUGAN) business objectives focused on working closely with the Department Geography to implement the Distinguished Alumni Speaker Series and support the department to promote the discipline to current and new students. This work will continue in 2016, namely the alumni lecture series, production of the newsletter, award recognition and building our network.

Financially we are a stable network, receiving contributions from fellow alumni and through existing endowments, which has enabled us to provide financial opportunities to support geography students and activities of York Geography. With Executive Committee approval we financially contributed to the Alumni speaker events, the Ian Brookes reception, the Ross Patterson Awards, the Annual Geography Awards Reception 2016 and miscellaneous events to further Geography students in their studies.

For implementation in 2016, YUGAN has formally established two new awards to recognize the accomplishments of current geography students and alumni. The First Year Awards are to be given to two geography undergraduate students obtaining top grades in each of the three Geography introductory courses. Students will be awarded \$250 each. These awards will be handed out on January 20th, 2016 at the Annual Geography Awards Reception hosted by the department. In joint YUGAN/Department endeavour, The Distinguished Alumni Award will recognize a York University geography graduate for her/his outstanding to geography, or a geography graduate who has had a distinguished career in the wider community in Canada or elsewhere. This award requires nominations that will be evaluated by an evaluation committee. Please stay tuned for additional details about this award.

With every alumni success, there is a unique opportunity to influence a new one. The next generation of Geography students

can benefit from the insight and wisdom of industry professionals that once walked the 3rd and 4th floor of the Ross building. In support of broadening the scope of student career aspirations, York Geography is undertaking an alumni business card drive. The department is building a display that highlights the variety of careers that geographers have, while showcasing our alumni achievements. I encourage you to spread the word and participate in this drive by either e-mailing or mailing your information to the Undergraduate Program Director, Tarmo Rimmel. This will also enable us to improve our communication and outreach with our alumni and build capacity for professional networking opportunities.

This year we will have a renewal of executive officers. Elections are to be held at the Annual General meeting October 2016. If you are interested in playing a role in the Executive Committee, I encourage you to contact us and come out to our meetings. Please consider supporting scholarships or volunteering your time as an alumni ambassador.

As alumni, we are part of the York University story of student success. More importantly, our paths of success have its starting point at York Geography, where many of us began. I consider the department of Geography a very big part of my story. There are moments that remind me of the tremendous impact the training and education from our Dept. has had on me and contributed to my success. Further, being President has enabled me to continue to be engaged with a discipline that I am so passionate about. These opportunities are available to you and are rewarding.

We hope you will connect with us whether it is by attending one of our many alumni events, or networking opportunities, by volunteering at Executive meetings, or by engaging in conversation with us through our social media outlets (Facebook and LinkedIn). By getting involved, the network will be able to better represent your interests.

On behalf of the YUGAN Executive Committee, I extend my very best wishes for a prosperous and productive 2016.

With Warmest Regards,

Lisa M. Oliveira, President, YUGAN

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



I hope that everyone reading this has had a joyful New Year. As I write this message, I can't help but reflect on the mixed emotions I am feeling as I approach my final 6 months as Chair of the Department. I will miss the pleasant responsibilities of the position. Greeting anxious students as they enter the program,

congratulating them as they graduate surrounded by their families, and working with them as alumni all make it worthwhile. At the same time, the challenge of dwindling resources and growing bureaucracy in the university sector makes any administrative role frustrating.

During my final year as Chair, the Department of Geography has been in the midst of a cyclical program review, a process of government quality control over post-secondary programs carried out every seven years. It is during this process that I've come to realize just how special and strong our department is despite recent enrollment challenges. Our faculty members are among the most excellent colleagues, teachers, and researchers. There is good reason why our department is internationally ranked among the top 100 in the world and top 10 in Canada. (If you separate our department's reputational ranking from York's institutional ranking, we are actually in the top 3 in Canada). Over the last 7 years, our 22 full-time faculty members have published over 300 articles in peer reviewed journals, a dozen books, and over 100 book chapters. Collectively, our faculty has generated millions of dollars in research funding and we have inserted ourselves into the public domain with over 100 media appearances (radio, newspapers, and tv). We are excited that we will be adding to our full-time ranks with a new hire in physical geography this winter.

But a successful and leading department is more than its faculty. Our support staff consists of ten dedicated professionals who assist administratively and provide technical expertise in the classroom and in the field. In many ways, our frontline staff are the face of the department as students often come to see them first. Our staff is also long serving with Carolyn King (Cartographer) having over 40 years of experience at York. Laura Tortorelli (Secretary to the Chair) reached a 30 year milestone at York in 2015. Her assistance has been pivotal to the success of our Chairs since the 1990s and hopefully will guide the next Chair through another successful term!

Central to success of any department, however, are students. I am fortunate enough to be able to teach at all levels, from the first year introduction to human geography course to our doctoral seminar. Witnessing students become excited by geographical thought as

freshman and continue that passion in more advanced studies is pure joy. I believe strongly, that the geographical perspective will continue to flourish in young scholars. Our undergraduate and graduate programs are central to this.

And lastly, our past students, now alumni, are another key part of our department. Their support for geography in general and our department in particular is unwavering. The support of our association, the newly named York University Geography Alumni Network (YUGAN), has supported visiting speakers, undergraduate students, and career development events. The enthusiastic leadership of past President Oliver Rendace (MA '00?) and current YUGAN President, Lisa Oliveira (MA '04?) is greatly appreciated and is part of making a great department in the future.

Our department is going through a normal leadership transition. Professors André Robert and Raju Das were excellent undergraduate and graduate program directors that were a pleasure to work with. Professor Tarmo Remmel is the newly appointed undergraduate program director and Professor Peter Vandergeest will replace Prof. Das in July. I am also pleased to announce that Professor Joseph Mensah will be our next Chair and I am confident that he will bring new energy with his leadership. I also trust that the new leadership team will continue to work with and develop YUGAN as an important part of our very special department.

Steven Tufts, Chair, Department of Geography

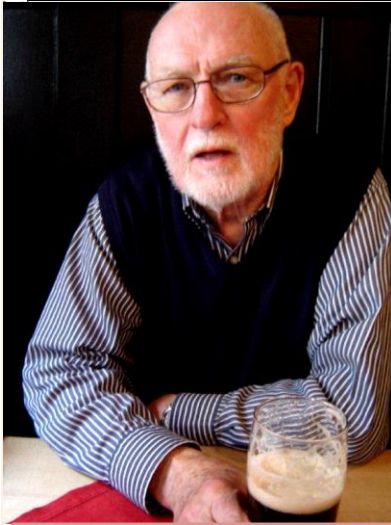


York Geography Alumni Association

Email: geogalum@yorku.ca

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Facebook and LinkedIn pages!



Jim Gibson enjoying one of the Joys of Archival Research, 2012

CRACKING THE ARCHIVES

(memories of a retired professor completing research in the former USSR)

Throughout my career, spent entirely at York University (except for visiting lectureships at Canterbury University, NZ in 1983 and the University of Hawaii in 1988) I was fortunate to be able to teach almost solely my special interests: the contemporary geography of the U.S.S.R., the Soviet Union as a model of economic development, and the historical geography of Russia. Most of my research efforts, however, have been focussed on Russian eastward expansion, for as a geographer, with biases towards the locational, environmental, and developmental dimensions of historical processes, it became obvious to me from the outset that one of the most striking aspects of Russia's development as a state was its steady and massive territorial growth into an empire, especially towards the east. This hallmark afforded fertile ground for a geographer, particularly since not much had yet been done on the topic by either historians or geographers in the West, although it had long been appreciated by Russian scholars. And, trained at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, notably Andrew Clark, to problem-orient my research, I pegged it to the obvious problem of logistics, which became more pressing the farther east the Russians advanced (as both Napoleon's Grande Armée and Hitler's Wehrmacht were to learn the hard way). Moreover, when the Russian landmen eventually entered the sea otter and fur seal waters of what they understandably called the "Eastern Ocean," they faced the unfamiliar challenge of not only maritimism but also that of formidable competition from not only other imperial powers but also indigenous peoples, particularly on the Northwest Coast of this New World. True to form, this comparative dimension raised different and intriguing questions. So my research paradigm was set.

It was the remotest theatre of this push to the east -- Russian America (the present state of Alaska) -- that captured my attention, partly because it was Russia's sole overseas colony and partly because it had received very little scholarly treatment on the basis of the Russian primary sources, so it was possible to make a solid contribution. Most of those sources were found in the archives of Moscow and Leningrad, but all of the U.S.S.R.'s archives were totally or largely closed to foreign (and sometimes

even Soviet) scholars for a variety of reasons, including: paranoia -- a suspicion of foreigners' intentions; chauvinism -- the notion that Russians should have priority, i.e., do it first; ideology -- bourgeois prejudice; or, it sometimes seemed, for no apparent reason at all. And, if Westerners *were* fortunate enough to be admitted -- thanks to a sympathetic Soviet advisor or colleague with either pull or balls, a benevolent curator, a discreet present, an innocuous topic, a clerical oversight, political expediency, or pure luck -- they usually were not permitted to consult the essential *opisi*, the detailed inventories of documents in individual collections. That left hapless readers at the tender mercies of archival catalogues (general, out-of-date, incomplete, and scarce), documentary citations in Soviet articles and monographs (sporadic and unreliable), and the unhelpful and unhurried drones in the archives who fetched the requested manuscripts. A maximum of fifty pages of inferior microfilm was sometimes allowed -- and invoiced at the officially inflated exchange rate and payable in dollars. Even any published sources in periodicals in libraries such as Moscow's Lenin Library (now the Russian State Library) and Leningrad's Saltykov-Shchedrin Library (now St. Petersburg's Russian National Library) with their rich collections were problematic because registration entailed much red tape, service was sluggish, and retrieval was uncertain -- and a reader was not allowed to browse the stacks. It was these obstacles that impeded my research in the Soviet Union as a ten-month postgrad in 1964-65 and on subsequent brief visits to attend conferences or to tour the country in the 1970s and 1980s (or to watch the memorable 1972 hockey summit!).

Such was the case until the end of the 1980s, when Leonid Brezhnev's *zastoi*, or "stagnation," unravelled in the face of Mikhail Gorbachov's *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness). A high-level decision was made to open the archives to any accredited researcher, and I saw my chance to make hay while the sun shone. I obtained funding from Canada's national exchange program in Ottawa for my project, which envisioned the collection, translation, and annotation of the most trustworthy and most informative firsthand accounts of "Russian California," an exclave of Russian America on the Sonoma County coast astride the blurred frontier between New Albion and Alta California some 75 miles north of the Spanish presidio and mission of San Francisco. It included a fort (Ross),

a port (Bodega), several “ranchos” (farms), and facilities for hunting sea otters, building ships, making bricks, and tanning hides, as well as a hunting and egg station on the Farallon Islands 30 miles west of the Golden Gate. Russian California was a going concern for three decades (1812-41), finally being overwhelmed by an excess of expenses over revenues and the disintegration of neighbouring Alta California – a province of the adolescent and beleaguered Republic of Mexico – as secessionist and federalist Californios squabbled and Washington’s politicians intrigued as American settlers multiplied. The isolated Russian colony was sold in 1841 to the Swiss German adventurer John Sutter, whose millrace on his Mexican land grant of New Helvetia along the Sacramento River was to trigger a game-changing gold rush towards the end of the decade. At any rate, thanks to the loosening of restrictions under Gorbachov, I now had the opportunity to make my documentary publication more comprehensive and more authoritative by scouring the Russian archives, including even provincial repositories.

When I reached the U.S.S.R. that first summer of 1990 I was excited by the prospect of archival access but still wary, expecting the usual hitches. And I was not disappointed. I arrived tired and testy after a long overnight flight to Moscow’s dreary Sheremetovo Airport, where my suitcase appeared belated and damaged and the customs officer tried to pilfer some of my dollars. And – contrary to official assurances beforehand – nobody awaited me with *transport* and a stipend, so I risked a ride to town in a freelance taxi, whose driver proved to be a much better drinker than driver. At the Academy [of Sciences] Hotel overlooking October Square with its towering statue of a heroic Lenin, no room had been reserved for me and I was curtly told not to expect one, while my desperate phone call to the Canadian Embassy elicited a lukewarm offer of possible help provided my life hung in the balance (after all, it was after business hours, I was not a businessman, and it was Friday). So I just sat down and looked as immobile and forlorn as possible until the stern but kindly manageress found a room for me for one night only. Then I sampled the culinary delights of the cockroach-frequented and smoke-filled *bufet* and went to bed in a vain attempt to fall asleep in the face of jet lag and a sagging mattress, plus a seatless toilet.

My misery continued the next day, when just up Lenin Prospect at the dilapidated headquarters of the prestigious Academy of Sciences my file could not be found for some time, and when it was finally located it turned out that no archival admittances at all had been obtained for me beforehand and no Soviet colleagues had been apprised of my coming – and all of this in spite of prior letters and telexes from the authorities assuring me (and Ottawa) that I was expected and that all of the necessary arrangements had been made. I was left to survive on my dimmed wits and rusty Russian, consoling myself with the thought that, despite Gorbachov, *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*.

Then, on day three, I was suddenly swept off my feet by the counterrevolution! The director of one of the Academy’s institutes (he was later to become Boris Yeltsin’s Minister for

Ethnic Relations) astounded and delighted me by proposing that my project become a joint venture with me and one of his colleagues as co-editors and with Russian and English editions. I listened giddily as he and another academician, a prominent specialist on Russian America, offered to phone and to telex various archival directors forthwith to secure access for me. Meanwhile, a generous ruble allowance for

meals and books materialized, as did a long-term, rent-free room at the Academy Hotel and free travel to, and accommodation in, other cities with relevant archives.

Within a few days I was working euphorically in my first archive, which, in addition to being within a pleasant walk from my hotel, also happened to be the exalted foreign policy archive, long deemed one of the country’s most inaccessible. Its building had been refurbished, with a spacious, well-lit reading room and even a clean toilet. I was met by a polite guard and welcomed by an attractive and congenial female staffer instead of a severe matron, and she not only offered me the essential *opisi*, brought documents to me promptly and in the original, and encouraged me to order an unlimited number of photocopies free of charge but also personally conducted me at lunchtime to one of the new cooperative cafes nearby where the food (and beer!) was tasty and cheap and the service prompt.



Professor Gibson at the Entrance to the State Archive of the Perm Territory

This heady treatment was repeated, if in a somewhat milder form, at the remaining repositories during that and the next three summer visits, including even the formerly strictly off-limits Central State Military History Archive in Moscow's old Lefortovo noble estate complex, which also included the notorious Lefortovo Prison of dissidents' memory. Two time zones east of Moscow within sight of the Ural Mountains at the regional archive in Perm, the old gateway to Siberia and the World War II relocation site for many members of the Soviet intelligentsia, particularly performers, I was given free legal-size photocopies of manuscripts, and in the best tradition of Russian *khlebosol'stvo* (literally, "bread and salt," i.e., hospitality) and/or duty, the attentive Communist Party overseer of the archive, took me with her every day in her chauffeur-drive car to a subsidized and bountiful lunch at her expense in the Party's exclusive downtown cafeteria. In off-hours on foot I delighted in exploring unmolested, and photographing unchallenged, the old and still largely wooden city, on whose buildings political graffiti now vied with official slogans. And so it went, too, in pleasant Dorpat cum Yuryev cum Tartu, soon-to-be-independent Estonia's old university town (and nationalist stronghold), and in rundown but still captivating Leningrad, soon to revert to St. Petersburg, where I even succeeded in becoming perhaps the first foreigner to use a credit card at the grand old Astoria Hotel (John Jacob Astor himself, Russian America's onetime trading partner, would have approved) and I even dined at the former headquarters on the Moika Canal of the Russian-American Company (which ran Russian America), now beautifully refurbished as an upscale restaurant – such was the speed of the transition from communism to capitalism.

Like George Kennan (a distant forebear of the author of the United States' containment policy of the Soviet Union during the Cold War), who had been given almost carte blanche in 1885 to document Siberia's exile system, I had been given the same mandate to document Russian California. However, whereas Kennan's findings came off the press within six years, it was not until thirty years later that my windfall was published (but, unlike Kennan, I did not turn from a Russophile into a Russophobe). Why the very long delay? For one thing, always having several research irons in the fire at the same time, I kept Russian California on the back burner, simmering rather than boiling because, not being entirely in control of it as a joint project and not yet having complete confidence in the Russians (Cold War habits die hard), I concentrated on those projects that I knew I could see to completion. Also, I translate laboriously, my Russian being neither native nor fluent. Besides, because I was translating primary sources that would be used as such by some readers, it behooved me to be meticulous, double and triple checking meanings, especially for contemporary senses, such as

chernozym [commonly misspelled as *chernozem*] and *tundra* meaning not just particular natural zones but, respectively, any dark, fertile soil and any barren outback. Moreover, sometimes the broken Russian on the part of semi-literate traders and the bureaucratic circumlocution, as well as the nautical terminology, was baffling and necessitated consultation with colleagues in Russian language and literature. Likewise puzzling was the script of some of the documents, whose deciphering could be painstakingly prolonged. Finally, the documents had to be thoroughly annotated; nearly every place, person, plant, animal, unit of weight or measure, special term, and the like had to be fully explicated – all of which required resort to a wide array of reference books.

At any rate, it was not until 2014 that the English edition appeared, handsomely published by Ashgate for The Hakluyt



A Remnant of Old Perm

Society in two thick volumes totaling nearly 1,200 pages and including almost 500 documents in 9 parts with 28 colour plates, 25 black-and-white figures, 4 endpaper maps, an 18-page bibliography, a 55-page index, and even an addendum and a corrigenda slip. The documents themselves – about 100 more than in the Russian edition – comprise mostly reports from the manager of Fort Ross to the governor of Russian America at Sitka (the majority of which have not survived), orders from the governor to the manager, and reports from the governor to the Board of Directors of the Russian-American Company (a chartered monopoly) in St. Petersburg, but they also include memoranda from government officials to the Company, excerpts from ships' journals and travel diaries, instructions to shipmasters and supercargoes, official and personal letters, reports by inspectors, censuses, contracts, protocols, warrants, advisories,

testimonies, testimonials, reports to Company shareholders, minutes of Company meetings, contemporary articles in obscure and rare journals, and so on.

These sources generally corroborate in much more detail what we already knew about Russian California, and they also provide considerable new information about its affairs. Admittedly, however, they do present a skewed picture, for the voices of the colony's labourers, of its females, of the young and the elderly of both sexes, and of the Californian, Alaskan, and Siberian natives at Fort Ross are missing, presumably because those above them in power did not think that they had anything of interest or import to record, while the unvoiced themselves were either illiterate or orally-based. One of the rare opportunities to capture this *vox populi* was, sadly, missed by one visitor, Lieutenant Vasily Zavoiko (the future heroic defender of Kamchatka's San Francisco-like port of Petropavlovsk against an Anglo-French naval attack in 1854 during the Crimean War). In the summer of 1838 he captained the ship *Nikolai I* that took Governor Kupreyanov from Sitka to Fort Ross for an inspection tour, and Zavoiko spent two weeks in the colony and hours talking to perhaps its most experienced and knowledgeable

colonist, the 73-year-old Siberian peasant and foreman Yefim Munin, who had served at Fort Ross since 1820. Regrettably, however, Zavoiko does not tell us in his epistolary account what the ageing veteran had to say. Ironically – and perhaps fittingly – it is Munin's name and not Zavoiko's that survives in the landscape today in garbled form in Rancho Muniz, a residential development just south of Fort Ross.

Nevertheless, the documents make accessible in English a detailed and reliable data bank for the study of an interesting and instructive but underappreciated theatre of the political, economic, military, and cultural struggles for control of the Pacific Slope of North America generally and its most promising component especially. They also reflect some of the fundamental weaknesses of Russia's tenure in the North Pacific as exemplified by its Californian colony, whose abandonment in 1841 anticipated Russia's complete withdrawal from North America a quarter of a century later in favour of more promising prospects closer to home in the Far East in the wake of the decline of Manchu China – a reorientation that was facilitated by the climate of reform stemming from Russia's humiliating defeat in the same war that lionized Zavoiko.



The Estonian Historical Archive

Remembering Ian Brookes

On October 2, 2015 about 40 friends gathered in the Department to remember Ian Brookes, York's first physical geographer. Ian's obituary has already appeared in *Contour Lines* 2015, along with that of five colleagues. Since Ian had no family in Canada to organize a celebration of his life, the Department with the assistance of the Alumni Association organized a tribute. Speakers included Jane Baker, Ian's sister from Worthing, England, who read memories of his early years written by his other sister Kate Frankland. Kathy Young prepared a power point presentation that captured the highlights of Ian's career as a physical geographer. Bryn Greer-Wootten and Glen Norcliffe spoke of Ian's time as a student at McGill, as a colleague in the Department, his sense of justice, and his broad range of interests. Keith Tinkler of Brock University, who had worked with Ian in the field, outlined Ian's scholarly contributions to the study of glaciation in Canada. Two former students, Dominic Crawley (BA/67) YGAA's first President and Susan Laskin (BA/74), reminisced about Ian's field trips with his students.

Friends and former colleagues, including some from York and Newfoundland, where Ian did his most important fieldwork, sent recollections of Ian. He had a great sense of humour and also tenacity, as is shown in this story by Judy Barraclough, Ian's former partner, who remained his good friend. Judy could not attend the remembrance, but her memory of Ian was read, and is printed here with her permission. As Judy said when she sent it: *"I think it gives a picture of the Ian that loved life and hated convention."*

Ian and I decided to explore Mexico whilst he was on sabbatical in 1973. We were staying in the delightful small town of Guanajuato just north of San Miguel de Allende (a well known artsy destination for Gringos). We had picked a small, very Mexican hotel with not many amenities (such as room service). Consequently we had our Coleman stove in the bathroom conveniently placed for an after dinner cuppa. (Very important for two English expats.)

One evening I gingerly tried to light the stove and immediately realized that it had been leaking and anything flammable was engulfed in seconds, quickly passing from the bathroom into bedroom. The hotel was built around a courtyard with a pond in the centre. So quickly after much hue and cry, a human chain had formed passing water up to the second storey, where Ian was at the end of the chain, bravely battling the fire. He put it out, but during the endeavour managed to burn his hand quite badly.

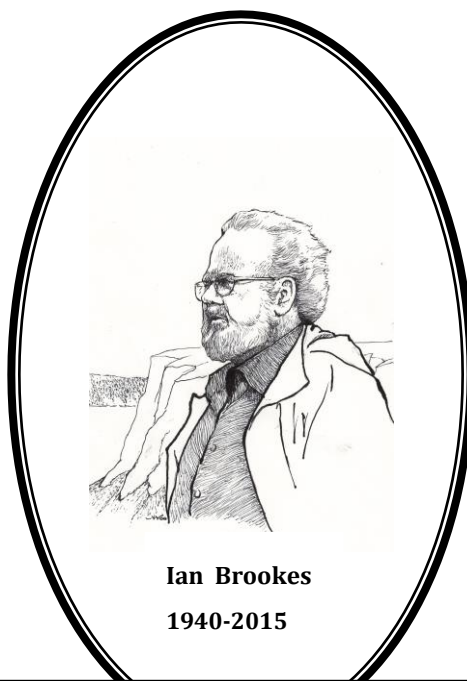
After paying damages we were thrown out of town and continued on our sojourn to the east coast of Mexico. There were a few difficulties, as Ian's bandaged hand had to be regularly checked and re bandaged at any clinics, hospitals that we could find en route. On reaching the coast, we happened

upon a small, idyllic island "Islas Mujeres."

Ah, the paradise we had dreamt about finding.

A couple of days into the stay we ventured out to the far side of the island, away from the tourist hotels, and found a lovely, windswept secluded beach. Ian decided to go 'au natural' and ran into the ocean without a stitch on. Later that day as we walked around town, we were approached by two rather large policemen who promptly arrested him, stating that a 'government official's wife' had seen him naked in the ocean and had identified him - - - by his bandaged hand.

On being found guilty and told once again to leave town, Ian was given a receipt for the \$20 fine which I believe many of you might have seen on his office wall at York: "Por Actos Immorales sur playa." (Judy Barraclough, September 29, 2015)



Ian Brookes
1940-2015

The sketch of Ian, is by Ming-Ko (Hok) Woo, Professor Emeritus of Geography, McMaster University. It is based on a photograph of Ian in the Tablelands, Gros Morne National Parks Canada in 2007

Remembering Ian Brookes

Please join us in remembering Ian Brookes, the first physical geographer in our department.

Friday, Oct. 2 from 2 to 3:30pm

Geographic Resource Centre, S403 Ross

Ian's friends, current and retired members of the department, and especially his students, are warmly invited to be present and remember him.

Remarks at 2:30pm

Family, colleagues, former students and friends will speak briefly, and others are most welcome to add their memories.

Reception to follow



Susan Laskin has recently retired from Ryerson University, where she was a member of the Department of Geography

Speaking at the Remembrance.....



Dominic Crawley was the first President of the York Geography Alumni Network, a first alumni of York Geography and a Geography instructor for many years

Photos taken by:

Laura Walton

Research from a current Graduate Student – Peter Brogan

Building Spatial Justice Unionism in the Global City



I began the PhD program in the Department of Geography at York in 2009, motivated by a desire to do scholarship that would advance not only a critical political economic and urban geography of the contemporary world, but to produce knowledge that would aid the struggles of working class people who are building transformative movements for more socially just geographies. This led me to undertake a research project that explores the relationship between education restructuring in the K-12 sector, urban transformation, and the remaking of contemporary capitalism in the wake of the 2008 Great Recession. While rooted in radical geography and the Marxist Tradition in particular, I deploy Michal Burawoy's Extended Case Method to tell the story of how and why the remaking of two global cities—Chicago and New York—has both shaped and been transformed by struggles amongst rank-and-file teachers in their fight against the corporate-backed dismantling and commodification of public schools.

Beyond simply exploring how teacher unions have been affected by changes in particular cities or how even these different institutional contexts have altered the ability of teacher unions to challenge the corporate-led reform of public schools, I examine how and why the contentious struggles over public education have been a key facet of urban change over the past 30-40 years, during which neoliberalism has ascended as the structuring political and economic logic of the United States. The main subject of analysis in my dissertation is the relationship between urban transformation (understood chiefly through a framework of neoliberalization and global city development) and the struggle of dissident rank-and-file teachers who have been organizing both in and outside of their unions.

I show how the goals of neoliberal education restructuring,

pursued under the guise of education reform, are fairly straightforward, even if they are rarely made explicit by policy makers or corporate reformers: *to expand the rule of the market (and thus increase profit) and to fragment and contain those populations that the U.S. capitalist class views as disposable and dangerous (who are overwhelmingly Black, Latino/a, and poor whites)*. The process of rationalization through which the neoliberalization of education occurs throughout U.S. cities and across the globe, is, like other aspects of neoliberalization and capitalist development, a highly variegated, differentiated, and extremely uneven process. It is also highly contested by parents, students, educators, and unions, albeit unevenly.

The overall goal of this study is to understand *how neoliberalization and global city development both constrain and enable the possibilities for working class organizations to transform the political and economic landscapes of contemporary capitalism*. I investigate this through an analysis of the assault on public education and teachers unions. More specifically, I illuminate how public school teachers in two of the most dynamic, globalized urban centers in the North America engage in political activism outside the classroom as a means to transform their unions into more democratic, member-driven and radical forces seeking spatial justice. They do this in order to more effectively challenge the neoliberal agenda of dismantling public education and remaking cities for profits, over people. While this dissertation is primarily concerned with questions of activism, political economy, and education policy, it is essential that we acknowledge how crucial teachers unions can be in



mediating and improving (or not, as is often the case) the everyday lives of teachers who do not necessarily view their unions as relevant or think of themselves as “political” people.

In My Opinion

As a parent of three sons in TDSB schools, I find myself taking an interest (too much interest, they would say) in how Geography is presented in the Ontario curriculum. One would hope that the discipline would infect kids with an early enthusiasm for engaging with the world around them. Perhaps they would also be left thinking of Geography as a challenging and stimulating field that might be on the radar when post-secondary pathways are being considered. Unfortunately, as far as I can tell, this isn't the case.

I should say at the outset that I write about this issue based on an unhealthy dose of opinionated ignorance. Although I have taken a look at the official curricula mandated by the provincial government, and at the textbooks used (and I have, I admit, become involved in the occasional homework assignment as well), I can't claim to have studied closely the ways in which Geography is really taught in Ontario's schools. I am sure that individual teachers do things creatively in their own way. But from what I have seen, there are two issues of concern. One relates to when students are exposed to Geography, the other relates to how the discipline is presented.

When do students receive their introduction to Geography as a field of study? As far as I can tell, this happens almost exclusively in Grades 7, 8 and 9. While some courses might be offered by Geography teachers in the upper years of high school, these seem generally to be electives such as 'Travel and Tourism' or 'World Issues'. For the most part, students are done with Geography by the end of Grade 9.

We should be pleased, I suppose, that the discipline is presented as a foundational building block in a student's education, and one that needs to be introduced early. There are, however, disadvantages. By teaching Geography in these years the discipline is treated in a very elementary way. Other fields, such as Physics or Economics are not introduced (at least explicitly) until the later years of high school, when they can be addressed at a more mature and sophisticated level. Nor does Geography get the same billing as History or Math, which are there throughout the elementary and high school years and so get treated in increasingly complex and specialized ways.

Geography gets relegated to being a subject that people are exposed to, and then abandon, not far beyond the elementary years. I'm sure we've all had those conversations that involve disabusing someone of their misconception that Geography is all about colouring in maps, knowing capital cities, and naming mountains. But one can hardly be surprised by this impression, given that most people relate to the discipline as that simplified subject they last studied when they were thirteen.

This brings me to the second issue, which is how Geography is conceived and presented during those precious few years when it has a place in our schools. Looking over the provincial curriculum documents, it is clear that an impressive amount of thought has been given to what Geography is, and what the discipline might offer to students. (In fact, the provincial documents give a lot more explicit thought to learning goals than we often give to our university curricula). Many of the elements included in the school curriculum are things that we could all support. In Grade 9, for example, Geography is defined as being about "the significance of 'place' as it relates to the natural environment, the human environment, and interactions within and between." Not much to complain about there.

The problem arises when this general definition is unpacked and various constituent parts are spelled out. Geography is elaborated as encompassing a) spatial significance, meaning "the importance of a place or region"; b) patterns and trends in time and space; c) interrelationships both within physical or human systems and across the social-environmental divide; and, d) "geographic perspectives", which means considering "the environmental, economic, political, and/or social implications of the issues, events, developments, and/or phenomena" being analyzed. In other words, almost every definition of Geography is encompassed here, from physical environmental systems, to spatial patterns, to connections across space, to the distinctiveness of places, to the techniques of mapping and graphical representation.

There is, then an impressive scope in the Grade 9 curriculum, and many important issues are addressed. But

one has to remember that this is a subject being taken as one of eight courses, with an allocation of perhaps 3 classroom hours per week. The result, it seems to me, is that in the effort to squeeze almost everything that Geography might be into a single year, the Grade 9 curriculum ends up covering a lot of things very thinly. There is a danger that the discipline simply becomes a repository for all manner of inter-disciplinary subject matter, general knowledge, current affairs, civic education, data skills, and even trivia. Consider, for example, that at my son's high school the Geography Challenge quiz was won by answering questions such as "the Komodo Dragon, the world's heaviest lizard, is native to which Asian country?" and "The city of Dhaka is located in which country".

Ideally, Geography should be offered more extensively at high school so that the various elements of the discipline can be tackled with more detail and sophistication. This seems unlikely, in part because of a Catch 22 situation in which fewer Geography offerings mean that it is a less appealing 'teachable' for trainee teachers. Fewer qualified and enthusiastic Geography teachers in turn means less likelihood of courses being developed at upper year levels.

Perhaps what we need instead in Grade 9 is a more focused intellectual lens - a way of thinking that is geographical, rather than just a collection of knowledge. What might this lens be? There are many possibilities. It might focus exclusively on the society-nature interface. But that tends to neglect many of the spatial and place-based phenomena that are the focus of human geographers. Another option might be to focus on global connections, and this does provide much of the basis for the current curriculum - the textbook used in many schools is titled 'Making Connections: Canada's Geography'.

Another alternative, and to my mind the least diffuse and the most manageable at that age level, would be to focus on landscape. There are some fundamental questions that can be asked: why does this landscape look the way it does, how is it changing, and what meanings does it have? From ice sheets, to rainforests, to ethnic neighbourhoods, to industrial suburbs, to high tech innovation districts, to shopping malls, to homes, to first nations territories, there is a story to tell and a set of processes to study. In each case, the concept of landscape gives a common conceptual focus.

This is not an unproblematic solution. It risks prioritizing

the visual and the material landscape. It also risks attending only to accessible, public and visible landscapes rather than those that are hidden. Attention would also be needed to ensure that diverse global landscapes are covered (it is much easier to study Chinatown in Toronto than to think about upland coffee farms in Vietnam). But, the concept of landscape has the benefit of giving a sense that geography is about understanding processes on the earth's surface and the world around us. It also gives a conceptual core to the discipline that is understandable and widely applicable.

To formulate your own opinions, you can take a look at the provincial curriculum documents here:

Grade 7 and 8:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/sshg.html>

Grade 9:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/canworld.html>



Phillip Kelly

Professor, Department of Geography

Alumni Business Card Drive

*The Department of Geography at York University
is requesting your business card*

*We are building a display that highlights the variety of careers
that geographers have, while showcasing our alumni
achievements*

– Broaden the scope of student career aspirations –



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Recognition of Professor Emeritus Conrad Heidenreich



Professor Emeritus Conrad Heidenreich received two esteemed awards in the fall of 2015. In September, the Ontario Archaeological Society recognized his "outstanding work benefitting Ontario archaeology" with its highest honour, the J. Norman Emerson Silver Medal. In November, Dr. Heidenreich received the University of Toronto Association of Geography Alumni (UTAGA) Distinguished Alumnus Award for "a career of exceptional distinction."



Professor Heidenreich taught historical geography at York University for 34 years. He came to York University in 1962 to teach in the Geography Department. He developed specializations in historical geography, particularly the cultural geography of Canada at the time of Native Peoples - European contact, and the history of Canadian cartography. Professor Heidenreich is the authority on the early period of French Exploration in North America and 17th century Canada.

Geography Alumni Distinguished Lecture

Professor Caroline Desbiens, Laval University: Power From the North: The Impact of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project on the natural environment, lives of local residents and the imagination of Quebec.

Geography Alumni Network Physical Geography Lecture

Steven Brooks, Department of Life Sciences, London Museum of Natural History: Unlocking the Vault: Natural History Museum Collections and Long Term Climate Change Responses in Butterflies.

York Geography Awards Reception



Congratulations Veronica, Asma, Mandy, and Julia on top grades in our 1000-level courses



Congratulations Katherine on earning the Science Geography Book Prize



Congratulations Shivon on earning the Hans Carol Prize for excellence at the 3rd year level



Warkentin awardees



Tarmo Remmel captivates the crowd at the York University Geography Awards Reception

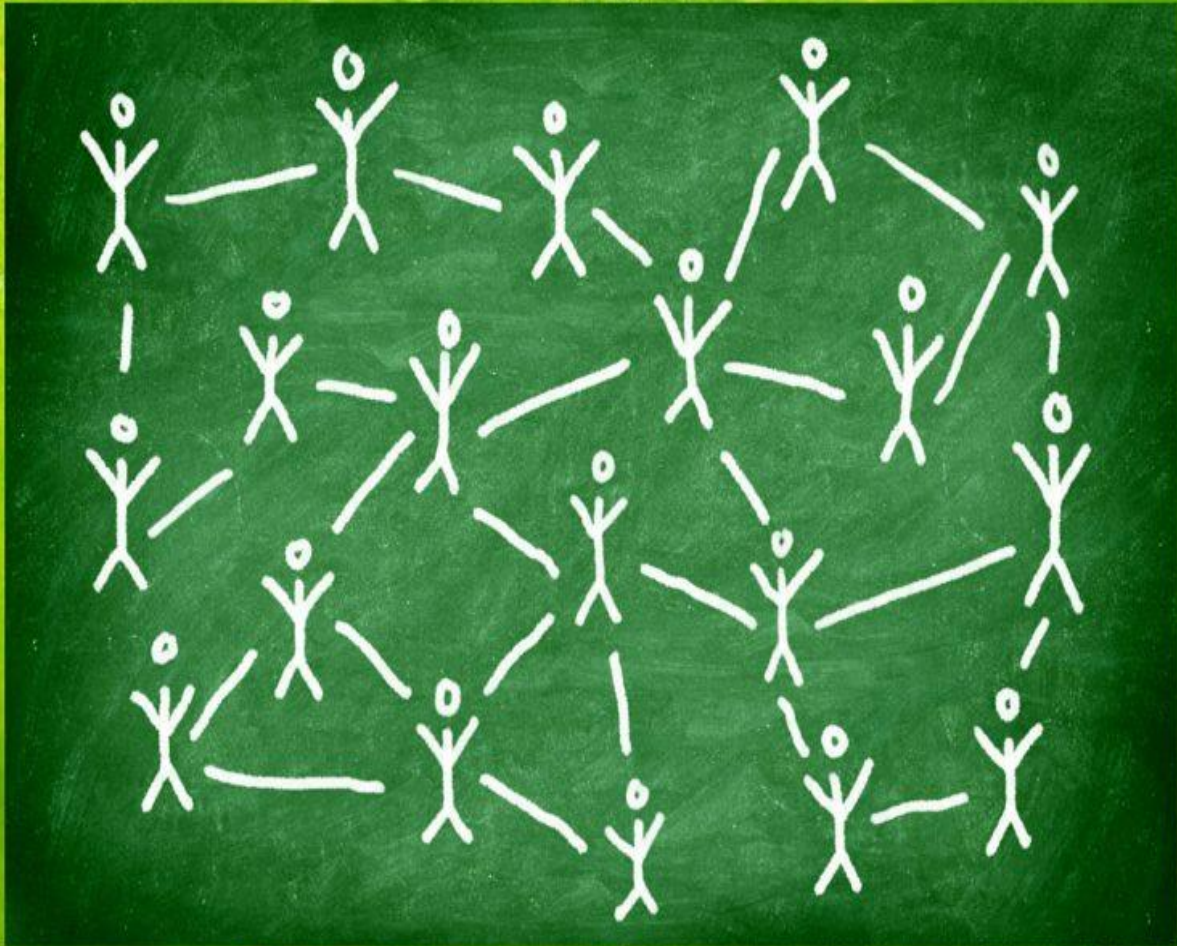


Marissa Chase receiving the LAP&S Geography Book Prize



Getting things started up at the reception

Network



1. A group of people who are interconnected. 2. A group of contacts with similar professional or social interests. 3. Your YUGAN