

## A HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHY AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY<sup>1</sup>

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**T**he establishment of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (OAMC) in Stillwater in 1890 initiated a series of improvements to the educational terrain of Oklahoma Territory, and subsequently, Oklahoma. The early history of OAMC is also a study of the diffusion of an innovation, replete with barriers and challenges to the acceptance of this new institution. As a land-grant institution, OAMC enhanced the accessibility of public education. Geography has been part of the identity of OAMC from the very beginning.

It is not unreasonable to question the rationale for creating an institution of higher learning in Stillwater in 1890. After all, the existence of a college presumes also the existence of a sufficient number of high school graduates with college aspirations. Yet, in Oklahoma and Indian territories, the geography of public schools, or common schools as they were then known, was highly uneven. Many places, including Stillwater, lacked high schools. Of the communities that did possess high schools, some offered only three-year programs.

The lack of widespread and standardized high school education shaped the operation of OAMC in three important ways. First, it led to the establishment of two different departments: a "preparatory department" and a "collegiate department." The preparatory department was designed to accommodate those students who lacked requisite high school work. It helped ready students for college and provided training for teacher certification (Rulon 1975). Second, it helped geography to become ensconced as a required topic of study in the institution's first years. Third, it justified the use of entrance exams in those instances when a student lacked a common school diploma.

Initially, physical geography was taught in the preparatory department (OAMC

1891). In subsequent years, a course in general geography was also added to its curriculum (OAMC [1893]). Early texts included E. J. Houston's 1891 edition of *New Physical Geography*, and Redway and Hinman's *Natural Advanced Geography* (OAMC [1899]; Rulon 1975; OAMC [1895]). Courses in meteorology and physical geography were taught in the collegiate department (OAMC [1895]).

A basic knowledge of geography was not only part of the curriculum but was also required for admission to OAMC. By the middle of the 1890s, entrance exams had been implemented. Admission to the freshman class at OAMC required that students pass exams in "English grammar, U.S. history, arithmetic, geography, physiology, and physical geography" (OAMC [1895]: 32). For admission at the sub-freshman level for study in the preparatory department, entrance exams in "writing, reading, orthography, arithmetic, English grammar, and geography" were required (OAMC [1895]: 32).

### **The Birth of a Department, 1914–1946**

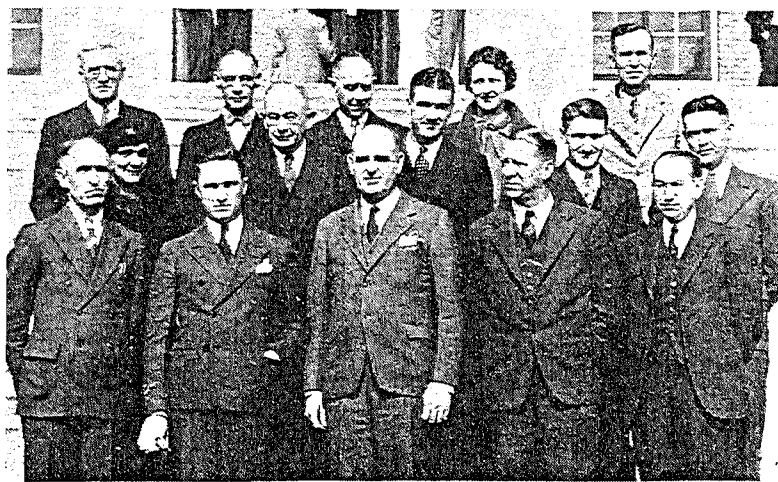
The establishment in 1914 of the School of Commerce and Marketing, the forerunner of the College of Business Administration, would gradually reshape, expand, and strengthen geography's presence on campus. Two programs or departments were created in the School of Commerce. One was a two-year business training program, the other an economics and marketing program. Both programs were offered at the college level and required coursework in business or commercial geography. For a number of years, the standard text for this was geographer J. Russell Smith's *Industrial and Commercial Geography* (OAMC [1917], 1921). In the preparatory department, which had evolved into the secondary school, instruction in commercial and physical geography continued through the mid-1920s (OAMC 1925).

In 1926, the School of Commerce and Marketing was reorganized into the Department of Business Administration (Kincaid 1987). One result of this restructuring was the creation of an economics and sociology department, which was responsible for the commercial geography course, otherwise known as "Econ. 106." The association of geography with economics and commerce is not unusual

and can be attributed to the influence of Emory R. Johnson and J. Russell Smith, whose work at the Wharton School and Columbia University, respectively, created a niche for geography in the business curriculum (Martin and James 1993).

The appointment of Raymond Thomas as Dean of the School of Commerce in 1927 proved auspicious for geography. Dean Thomas cultivated interdisciplinary research, and his decision to hire a geographer to work in the economics and sociology department reflects his ability to see beyond academic titles and specializations (Kincaid 1987). Dean Thomas hired Meredith Burrill in 1930 (Figure 1). Burrill, known to his colleagues as “Pete,” had graduated from Clark University (Ph.D. 1930) and was the first professionally trained geographer hired at OAMC.

Burrill would be the first of a number of productive and successful Clark University graduates to influence geography at OAMC. Burrill’s training at Clark made him an excellent fit for his position in the School of Commerce. As a master’s student, Burrill had studied Maine’s weather in relation to its forest fires, and his dissertation examined Montreal’s industrial geography. Burrill’s familiarity with



**Figure 1.** Meredith “Pete” Burrill and his Commerce colleagues in 1935. Burrill is in the middle row, second from the right. Used with permission of Special Collections & University Archives, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

environmental and economic problems served him well in his new position. At OAMC, he initially retained his interest in industrial geography and published *An Atlas of Manufacturing Industry* in 1932. As the Depression wore on, Burrill's work continued to express his twin interests in ecological and social issues. In 1936, he published *A Socio-Economic Atlas of Oklahoma* as well as an article in the *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, in which he discussed Oklahoma's land use problems and its rural poverty. By 1937, Burrill was also working as a consultant to the Resettlement Administration in Dallas, Texas (Notes 1937).

Almost single-handedly, Burrill created a department of geography at OAMC, though he would leave the institution at about the time of its formal establishment. He expanded the number of geography courses offered, adding new ones such as World Geography, Elements of Geography, Conservation of Natural Resources, Cartography and Graphics, and Field Study of Geography (OAMC 1936, 1937, 1938). By 1935, just five years after his arrival at OAMC, Burrill had attained the rank of full professor. Burrill's success contributed to geography's growth and made additional faculty hires possible. In 1935, Russell Wilford Lynch (Ph.D. Columbia 1942) was hired. He was an economic geographer with interests in the Czech settlement of Oklahoma. Kenneth Bertrand (Ph.D. Wisconsin 1940) taught at OAMC from 1937 to 1942. An expert on Antarctica, he would go on to write one of the definitive histories of that region.

Geography was officially listed as an undergraduate degree program for the first time in 1939 (OAMC 1939). By 1940, geography had accumulated sufficient critical mass to pave the way for the establishment of an independent department in the School of Commerce.<sup>2</sup> That same year Burrill took a leave of absence from OAMC to serve as an economic geographer at the old General Land Office (GLO) in Washington, D.C. He was replaced by the physical geographer/meteorologist Hoyt Lemons (Ph.D. Nebraska 1941; State Board 1940). The following April, Burrill tendered his resignation and accepted a permanent position at the GLO (State Board 1941). His work at the Interior Department would culminate in his becoming the executive secretary of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and the foremost expert on toponyms.

Burrill's departure and the U.S. entry into the Second World War complicated administrative details for the fledgling department. In 1942, the department was nearly emptied of its faculty. Bertrand went on leave with the federal government for wartime industry, and Lemons resigned (OAMC 1943; State Board 1942). That same year, Lynch obtained his Ph.D. and was appointed head of the newly created department, but he also took a military leave of absence with the Navy (State Board 1942). Although Lynch is listed as having served as department head from 1942 to 1945, it is unclear to what extent he actually performed such duties (Kincaid 1987). He is not listed as teaching any courses after 1942, and it does not appear that he ever returned to campus after his military service (OAMC 1946). During the war, most of the teaching seems to have fallen to Paul Martin, a Clark graduate who was hired in 1942 (OAMC 1943).

### **Geography in the Post-War Period, 1946–1955**

Just as the Depression highlighted geography's utility as a social science with direct application to society's problems, the Second World War would also draw attention to the discipline's relevance and usher in a dramatic period of departmental growth. In 1946, Dean Thomas hired Edward Elmer Keso as professor and head of the geography department. A native of Freedom, Missouri, Keso had obtained his doctorate from George Peabody College for Teachers in 1937 and had been professor of history and geography at Central State College (now the University of Central Oklahoma) in Edmond. When the Oklahoma Geographical Society formed in Stillwater in 1939, he served as one of the council members (Notes 1939). He had also actively participated in the meetings of the Southwestern Social Science Association, achieving visibility in the state and region.

Keso may have been frustrated by the lack of advancement or recognition at Central State. After more than a decade of service there and bolstered by the publication of his book, *Conserving Our Resources*, Keso resigned in order to teach at Northeast Missouri State Teacher's College (Notes 1940). However, when the opportunity to serve as head of a young department of geography arose, he accepted it. The fact that he was an established faculty member already familiar

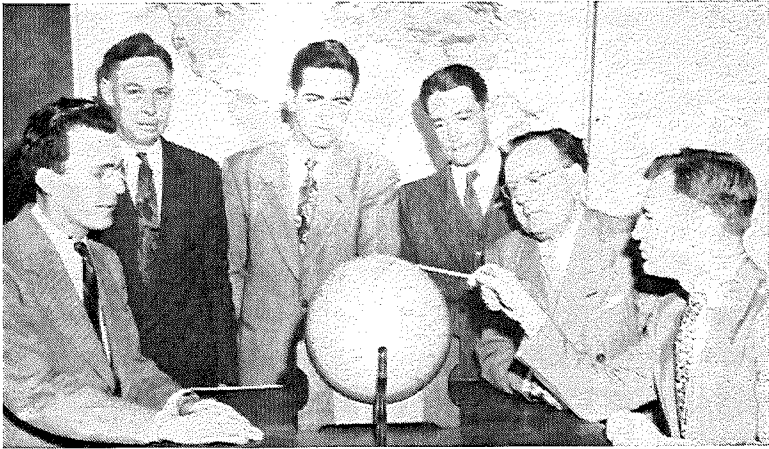
with higher education in Oklahoma primed him for the position.

Initially, geography flourished under Keso's leadership, and he acted promptly to strengthen the department. In his first year as head, he implemented a master's program. At spring commencement the following year, Vernon William Brockman earned the first master's degree in geography. In 1948, the Chi Chapter of Gamma Theta Upsilon was chartered on the Stillwater campus.

In addition to adding a graduate program, Keso expanded the number of courses offered and hired several new faculty. Between 1946 and 1947, six additional faculty joined the department. These new faculty included Ralph E. Birchard, George S. Corfield, Robert C. Fite, George P. Stevens, Rhoda Permenter, and David C. Winslow (Figure 2). As was common at the time, none of these individuals possessed the doctorate when first hired at OAMC. Birchard would later become a student of H. H. McCarty, earning his doctorate from the University of Iowa in 1954. He was an urban geographer who, after logging twenty-two years of service and being passed over for promotion on several occasions, eventually took a job at East Carolina University. Corfield was another Clark graduate, who had earned his master's degree in 1931 and had research interests in Middle America. He taught several regional courses and worked in the department until 1953.

Fite, who had served in the Navy and flew typhoon reconnaissance missions during the war, was working on his master's degree in educational administration at OAMC when Keso approached him about teaching meteorology courses in the department. Fite was already an experienced meteorologist whom the Navy had selected for advanced training at UCLA and Scripps Institute. His career at the university spanned thirty-five years and he played a major role in diversifying the meteorology and climatology courses in the department. In 1950–51, he took a leave of absence to satisfy the residency requirements at Northwestern and complete his dissertation.

Stevens would eventually earn his doctorate, but not for another two decades and long after his departure from OAMC. He taught the department's introductory course, *Elements of Geography*, as well as regional courses in North America and Asia. Permenter was the first woman to be hired on the faculty in the department.



**Figure 2.** Geography faculty, circa 1948. From left to right: George Stevens, Edward Keso, Robert Fite, David Winslow, George Corfield, and Ralph Birchard. Photo courtesy OSU Department of Geography.

An instructor, she taught at OAMC for just one year (OAMC 1947). Winslow, like Fite, was able to earn his doctorate while teaching at OAMC. He was a Clark graduate (Ph.D. 1948) whose dissertation examined land use and soil conservation districts in the Southwest. Some of the courses that he taught included Field Study, Conservation of Natural Resources, and Advanced Regional Climatology (OAMC 1949).

With the addition in 1949–1950 of Glenn Flora and William Hardy, both Northwestern graduates, the geography faculty numbered eight. The department, which had been housed in one of the ubiquitous temporary frame buildings since the war, needed additional space. A move was on the horizon, presaging geography's institutional relocation from the Division of Commerce to the School of Arts and Sciences. That shift occurred in 1949, the same year that the department moved into more permanent quarters in the Home Economics Building (Hanson and Stout 1992).

The 1950s constitute a turning point in the history of the department, marking the onset of more challenging times. Beginning about 1951, Keso's health began

to fail. He was anemic and suffered from gout-like symptoms that eventually resulted in the amputation of one of his legs. Keso was reluctant, however, to relinquish his position as head. This prompted Birchard, Fite, and Winslow to go to the dean and express their concerns about Keso's ability to lead the department. When the university experienced a budget crisis in 1953, the dean found justification for reducing the number of departments in the college through a series of mergers. Geography was to be combined with geology and meteorology into a new Department of Earth Sciences (Hanson and Stout 1992). Although this goal was not entirely realized, geography was merged with geology in 1953.

In the process of combining the two departments, a new department head was appointed. The geologist V. Brown Monnett became the head of what was truly a schizophrenic department. Geography and geology were to function as one administratively, but curricular and teaching issues were handled separately. The departments were never physically combined but were located in separate buildings across campus from one another, effectively limiting faculty interaction. Perhaps for practical purposes or as a subtle sign of resistance to the merger, the name "Department of Earth Sciences" was never adopted. The department was instead known as the "Department of Geology and Geography."

Despite the close association between geography and meteorology, a series of parallel events led to the loss of the meteorology program. Most of the meteorology courses were taught by geography faculty, specifically Fite and Hardy. In addition, Hardy, who also operated the campus weather station, had secured an Air Force contract to upgrade it (Hanson and Stout 1992). However, in 1955, he accepted a position at the University of Georgia. The administration then decided to withdraw its support from the weather station and end the meteorology program at the Stillwater campus. Geography endured these developments because it still had Fite, who had designed and taught the bulk of the meteorology courses.

### **Benign Neglect, 1955–1969**

The geology–geography merger reversed the enormous gains geography had made during the immediate post-war period. Corfield, Stevens, Winslow, Flora,



and Hardy had departed from OAMC and were slow to be replaced. Fite begrudged the loss of the meteorology program and did not find the geology–geography merger productive. The changes in the 1950s discouraged his involvement with the geography program, and he sought greener pastures. In 1956, he was appointed the first director of Arts and Sciences Extension. He would spend the next twenty-four years developing and coordinating various extension programs, not returning to geography until 1980. In 1957, OAMC was formally recognized as Oklahoma State University of Agriculture and Applied Science (OSU), and the School of Arts and Sciences was designated the College of Arts and Sciences (Hanson and Stout 1992).

During the late 1950s and 1960s, several new faculty were hired, but faculty retention was becoming a problem. James Stine and Arthur Earick (Ph.D. Michigan 1969) joined the faculty in the late 1950s. Earick taught for three years before moving on, while Stine was one of the few who spent the bulk of his academic career at OSU. In 1960, Jack Moore was hired in a joint appointment with geography and air science. He was an Air Force officer who spent nearly two decades teaching courses on physical geography, climatology, and Latin America. Both Stine and Moore had earned their master's degrees in geography from OSU. Between 1962 and 1968, six additional faculty were hired, including John Hidore (Ph.D. Iowa 1960), Robert Brown (Ph.D. Michigan State 1967), Jerry Croft (Ed.D. Tulsa 1971), Ralph Cross (Ph.D. Michigan State 1968), Michael Roberts (Ph.D. Iowa 1966), and James Harrison (Ph.D. Oklahoma 1972). All but Croft left OSU after two or three years.

Faculty attrition contributed to geography's instability, but the steady decline and deactivation of the graduate program was also part of the problem. No one can recall just why or when the decision was made to deactivate the graduate program. Hindsight suggests that geography was perceived as being a weak program, and the inability to retain faculty raised doubts about the reputation of the program. Curiously, none of the college catalogs records the deactivation of the graduate program; rather, geography remains listed as a viable program of study leading to the master's degree for the duration of this period. A review of the

geography master's theses completed, however, sheds some light on these developments. Geography theses were being completed at the rate of about three per year through the 1950s. No theses appear to have been completed after 1963, suggesting that deactivation of the master's program was underway as early as 1960.

By the late 1960s, geography was in a downward spiral triggered by the merger with geology, the departure of several credentialed geographers, and the deactivation of the graduate program. These events significantly reduced geography's stature on the OSU campus. Just three geography faculty remained at OSU: Jerry Croft, Jack Moore, and James Stine. None of them had earned the doctorate, and of the three, only Croft would do so, gaining a specialization in geographic education. A fourth geographer, Herb Kershaw, worked in the department on a part-time basis. Once a synoptic meteorologist with the U.S. Coast Guard, he did gigs as a fill-in news meteorologist for Channel 4 in Oklahoma City. He was irrepressibly cheerful and upbeat at all times, and his television stints earned him a statewide following. His visibility and popularity helped to counter some of geography's troubles.

By all accounts, Stine should have earned his doctorate. Those who knew Stine consistently characterize him as the most brilliant geographer in the department's past. Stine was an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation who, after completing his bachelor's and master's degrees at OSU, entered the doctoral program at the University of Washington. There he joined the Garrison group and studied with Brian Berry, Duane Marble, Richard Morrill, and others. When he was hired as an assistant professor in 1957, he was seen as a rising star who brought a more theoretical dimension to the department. He and Birchard, who left in 1968, were the first of the quantifiers to influence the department. Stine, who had served in the Korean War, did innovative work focusing on periodic markets in Korea. He also presented testimony used by the Federal Trade Commission in legal proceedings involving charges that Oklahoma's optometry laws restrained trade. His research showed that those laws prohibited the establishment of branch offices and therefore distanced many people from optometric services.

Stine was a valued and respected member of the department and university for more than thirty years. Students and colleagues recall his extraordinary knack for representing any idea graphically, using the blackboard to create elegant abstractions of concepts. As a member of the OSU Native American Faculty and Staff Association, he helped mentor and support Indian students, and was appointed by the dean to develop and implement strategies for improving Indian student recruitment and retention. A perfectionist, Stine never completed his dissertation. This weighed on him heavily over the years, and those who knew him consider this a personal and academic tragedy. The world never had the benefit of his brilliance. The year before he died, he returned to Korea in what proved to be an intensely gratifying, even liberating experience for him.

### **Reinvigoration, 1969–1978**

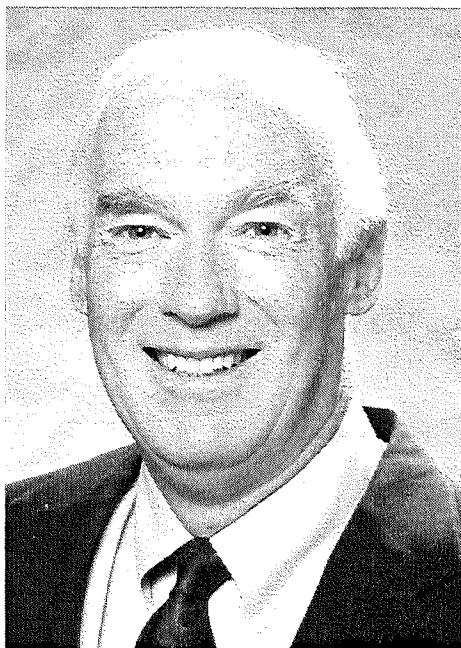
A series of administrative changes in the 1960s enabled the separation of geography from geology. Monnett, head of the combined department, became associate dean and John Stone, a geomorphologist, replaced Monnett as department head. In 1966, the geographers received word from the administration that they could begin a search for a new department head. Two years later, little progress had been made, compelling the geography faculty to prepare a memo to Stone. The subject of the memo was the future of geography at OSU. In five pages, it outlined the nature of the discipline and highlighted opportunities for geographers to contribute to research in regional development, urban affairs, area studies, and geographic education. The memo also proposed a development strategy for geography. Key to that strategy, according to the faculty, was "...that a young, dynamic, competent geographer be hired as department head. He must be able to provide strong leadership for the present staff and must be able to attract other staff to develop the opportunities present at OSU" (Birchard et al. 1968: 5).

In 1969, John Rooney was hired as department head (Figure 3). Croft, who had met Rooney at the University of Wyoming, had suggested that Rooney be interviewed. Rooney was twenty-eight at the time, and some, including Stone, believed that he was too young to serve as head. Nevertheless, he was recruited for the

position. Rooney, like Burrill, was another Clark graduate (Ph.D. 1966) and had been advised by Robert Kates and Raymond Murphy. As department head, Rooney would succeed in rebuilding the geography program, crafting a new identity for it and helping to establish a national reputation for the department.

Rooney was an opportunist who made the most of the administration's decision to support geography. As incoming department head, he won approval from the dean to make several immediate hires. Richard Hecock, a tenured faculty member at Eastern Michigan University, was one of the first newcomers. Hecock was also a Clark graduate who had been Van Valkenburg's teaching assistant and, like Rooney, one of Kates's advisees. Hecock's specialization was in outdoor recreation and resource management. Ewart Johns, a graduate of Cambridge University, whom Rooney had met when he worked as an exchange professor at the University of Exeter, was also hired. Johns was an established urban geographer known for his book, *British Townscapes*. He was succeeded in 1971 by Rich Watson, a

**Figure 3.** John F. Rooney, Jr. in 1990. He served as department head from 1969 to 1978, and again from 1992 to 1994. Photo courtesy OSU Department of Geography.



geography instructor and UCLA graduate who became the extension coordinator for the department and was a specialist in urban planning. Doug McDonald, who had been one of Rooney's advisees at SIU, was also hired as instructor and departmental cartographer.

By 1975, another five faculty had been hired in geography, bringing the number of faculty to eleven and creating the basic strengths in cultural/historical geography and resource management that still define the department today. The addition of Keith Harries (Ph.D. UCLA 1969) and Paul Hagle (Ph.D. Texas 1973) brought expertise in urban and economic geography. George Carney (Ph.D. OSU 1971), Stephen Tweedie (Ph.D. Syracuse 1969), and Robert Norris (Ph.D. Iowa 1970) contributed to the historical/social geography focus in the department. These several geographers, following Rooney's lead, influenced the character of the department for more than a decade.

Rooney was the first geographer to document and analyze the spatial patterns of player production. A native of Detroit who grew up playing competitive sports, he never lost his fascination with them. Indeed, he soon realized that the university milieu provided a perfect opportunity to cultivate his interest in the geographical dimensions of sport. His background in economics—he had double-majored in geography and economics as an undergraduate at Illinois State—influenced his approach to the topic. As an economist would chart the supply, movement, and value of a commodity, so Rooney sought to understand the sources of players, their movement, and the places they played; that is, which states and institutions considered them valuable.

Rooney's type of geography represented yet another departure from traditional geography. Not only was it quantitatively and statistically informed, but it dealt with a topic in popular culture—a subject long considered unfit for the serious scholar. Rooney's geography had its detractors. Following a meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association in the early 1970s where Rooney had given a presentation, John Morris, the long-time chair of the department of geography at the University of Oklahoma, made the following observation: "This geography of sport is not real geography and time will prove me correct on this" (Croft

2003). The publication of Rooney's book, *A Geography of American Sport*, established a new subfield in geography. The work that propelled Rooney into the national spotlight as a leading analyst of trends shaping college athletics was *The Recruiting Game*.

As department head, Rooney proved to be a dynamic and gifted leader with a propensity for spotting talent in others. He was charismatic, with an easy-going, almost laid-back manner. Most importantly, he was extremely encouraging and supportive of his faculty and their work, always quick to acknowledge their contributions and accomplishments. And productive they were, in publications, grants, and extension activities. The result was that OSU became a center of innovation in social and cultural geography. In addition to Rooney's work in the geography of sport, Harries produced some of the first studies analyzing the socio-economic and geographic aspects of crime. His several major books on these topics also earned him national and international recognition.

Carney pioneered the geography of music, and as early as 1971, his research had been funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as several state-based organizations. In 1974, Carney began publishing his research on music. One of the first of his articles on this topic, "Bluegrass Grows All Around: The Spatial Dimensions of a Country Music Style," won an award for best content from the *Journal of Geography* and the National Council for Geographic Education. He also served as project coordinator for a television documentary, *Music of the People*, which became the first public television show produced in Oklahoma to be aired nationally on PBS. As a result of these and numerous other projects, Carney also achieved distinction.

In 1978, Carney was invited to participate in a survey of Oklahoma's historic properties. Since then, he has succeeded in establishing an immensely valuable and productive relationship between geography and the State Historic Preservation Office of the Oklahoma Historical Society. He is a recognized leader in the state in terms of his knowledge of historic preservation. Carney's success in obtaining federal grants to fund his research has been impressive and has supported numerous graduate students over the years.

Norris, when hired in 1974, directed the department's extension programs. He was a specialist in political geography and one of his major extension projects involved conducting a census of the Choctaw Nation. His major contribution to the discipline was through textbook authorship. He authored several geography texts, including one on world regional geography. His book, *Political Geography*, became a leading textbook in that subfield.

Funding from the Department of Interior, Office of Water Resources Research, supported Hecock's studies of recreational uses of Oklahoma lakes and the impact of reservoir creation on recreational activity. In addition, between 1971 and 1973, he helped the department become one of the first in the country to obtain funding as part of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Cooperative College-School System Project. Geography faculty conducted summer institutes for training high school teachers in an effort to improve geography instruction, initially emphasizing the Tulsa and Oklahoma City school systems. Hecock directed this extension program with assistance from several of his colleagues, including Croft and Harries. Croft's creative work in the development of simulation games as instructional aids was a featured component of these geography institutes. One of his simulation games was used to teach about the process of location analysis (Tulsans at OSU 1971). These institutes were based on the inquiry approach to instruction and learning, and incorporated several other exercises to engage participants in active learning.

In addition to the instructional institutes described above, geographers were very active in several other extension projects. The establishment, in 1972, of the Community Development Institute at OSU helped geography to acquire a major role in extension activities because of faculty expertise in planning and regional development (Extends a Helping Hand 1974). Using unpublished 1970 census data, Harries produced an atlas of Stillwater that delighted the U.S. Census Bureau and is one of the first such computer-generated, city-based atlases made. Hagle conducted a study of housing conditions in Oklahoma and, with Watson, also created a number of city, state, and county-based planning atlases. The various extension projects highlighted the department's visibility around the state and

contributed to the growing emphasis on applied geography.

Another development during the 1970s that drew substantial attention to the department was the establishment of the Society for the North American Cultural Survey (SNACS). This organization brought renewed vigor to American cultural geography. SNACS was formed in 1974 and eventually published *This Remarkable Continent*, an atlas about North American folk and popular culture. This atlas began to take shape when W.F.H. Nicholaisen, a folklorist in the Department of English at SUNY-Binghamton, helped to establish the American Folklore Atlas Project and sought sponsorship for it from the American Folklore Society (AFS). In 1973, Wilbur Zelinsky attended the AFS meeting and participated in discussions about that project. The following year, with funding from the American Council of Learned Societies, Penn State hosted a joint conference of folklorists and geographers. More than fifty scholars attended the meeting and decided that the atlas should reflect a broader vision and purpose. Thus, the project became referred to as the North American Cultural Survey. Pilot projects on topics such as diet, games, sports, and music were started, and maps were compiled in order to create working inventories that were called "scratch atlases."

Texas A&M hosted the spring 1975 conference for the group, and it was decided that SNACS should be chartered as a non-profit organization. Rooney was appointed Executive Director, and a board of directors was elected. Members of the board included geographers David Sopher, John Fraser Hart, Milton Newton, Wilbur Zelinsky, Larry Ford, Dean Louder, folklorists Bruce Buckley and Mike Bell, and the anthropologist D. Beth Bussey. By virtue of their ties with geography at OSU and their interests in American culture, George Carney and Steve Tweedie also actively participated in SNACS from the very beginning. Carney helped edit the second "scratch" atlas, while Tweedie, with help from Zelinsky, consulted with Frederick Cassidy who was directing the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE) project. Because of the wide range of data it used and the importance it placed on local knowledge, DARE was considered an excellent model for the atlas project.

This SNACS project was always a collective and collaborative effort, though



Rooney played a crucial role in keeping the project on task, even establishing a newsletter for the organization in order to keep members informed of progress and developments. Between 1979 and 1981, Rooney also secured National Science Foundation funding for the production of the atlas. *This Remarkable Continent* remains a one-of-a-kind atlas, unique both in its subject matter and scope. It was a major enterprise that brought together some of the most highly regarded cultural geographers, folklorists, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists in the country, greatly enhancing the reputation of geography at OSU and achieving additional recognition for cultural geography. Following the publication of the atlas, SNACS continued to hold annual meetings and launched the journal, *North American Culture*. In 1990, the organization changed its name to the North American Culture Society (NACS), and production of the journal continued through 1991.

Through the 1970s, geography staff also factored prominently in the department's operational success. Old-timers still recall the able assistance provided by Sue Flippin, "Frick and Frack" (Diana Frick and Diana Frack), and cartographer Donald Wade. If there was a shortcoming in the department, it was the under-representation of physical geography. Toward the end of the 1970s, however, new faculty were hired with the intent of addressing this. John Vitek (Ph.D. Iowa 1973), a geomorphologist, joined the department in 1978. The following year, the department added Stephen Walsh (Ph.D. Oregon State University 1977), a specialist in remote sensing.

In 1978, after a decade as department head, Rooney stepped down. During his leadership, the department had accumulated an extensive list of accomplishments. The number of full-time geography faculty had trebled, rising from four to twelve and creating in the process a department that was reasonably balanced in terms of physical and human geographers. The curriculum had been updated, and the department had experienced steady increases in total enrollment and in the numbers of geography majors.

Rooney played a major role in revitalizing and expanding the graduate program. By 1972, twenty-six graduate students were enrolled in the master's program, a program that had been revived only three years previously (AAG 1972).

Through collaboration with the College of Education, Rooney also implemented a program that enabled graduate students to earn the doctor of education degree with a specialization in geographic education. That program, which also began in 1969, had grown to include ten students by 1973 (AAG 1973). This program has enjoyed a high placement rate for its graduates, many of whom obtained faculty positions, including Malcolm Fairweather (Ed.D. 1974), who served as the Director of the Center for Earth and Environmental Science at SUNY-Plattsburgh, and Don Hagan (Ed.D. 1975), a popular professor and department chair at Northwest Missouri State University.

Rooney also bolstered the contributions that geographers made to extension projects, a development that was facilitated by his success in creating a cartographic laboratory in the department. Together, the geography faculty created a department that was recognized for its innovative contributions to social and cultural geography.

### **New Trajectories, 1978–1992**

Dick Hecock succeeded Rooney as department head in 1978, and, while the changeover was seamless, Rooney and Hecock had very different leadership styles. If Rooney was the magnanimous wheeler-dealer, then Hecock was the master of stoicism. Most days, Hecock arrived at the office before 5:30 A.M. He was a shrewd and strategic thinker whose conscientious decisions reflected the long-term interests of the department. Hecock was also an excellent advocate for geography within the college and particularly with the dean. During Hecock's tenure as head, the department, for the first time ever, obtained thirteen full-time faculty lines.

One of the major changes to affect geography at this time was the status and operation of the Center for the Application of Remote Sensing (CARS). CARS received Board of Regents approval in the spring of 1979 and began operations that summer. Geographer Stephen Walsh was named its director. CARS was designed to be an interdisciplinary center with research, teaching, and extension roles. NASA provided initial training and financial assistance, matched with funds from the College of Arts and Sciences. This support enabled the purchase of a

minicomputer for data and image analysis.

As originally envisioned, CARS was to be self-supporting on the basis of research grants and projects. One of the problems that soon developed, however, was that the grants and contracts awarded were not sufficient to cover the maintenance costs of the equipment. To make matters worse, as an interdisciplinary center, CARS did not have dedicated space on campus and was not integrated with a particular department. This resulted in a number of time-consuming and costly moves in an attempt to find it a more permanent location.

On the positive side, under Walsh's leadership, CARS did win several sizable NASA grants utilizing remote sensing for hydrologic modeling and vegetation assessments, to evaluate sensors for biophysical modeling, and to determine the feasibility of using remotely sensed data for drought assessment. Importantly, the experience with CARS brought a new, technical dimension to the department that it had not possessed before. The subsequent hiring of Stephen Stadler (Ph.D. Indiana State 1979), an applied climatologist, and David Butler (Ph.D. Kansas 1982), a geomorphologist and biogeographer, increased the number of physical geographers in the department while adding faculty whose research might complement the mission of CARS. Another physical geographer, George Malanson (Ph.D. UCLA 1983) was also hired in a visiting position (Figure 4).

By the early 1980s, for disparate reasons, the geography faculty had become increasingly fractious. When hiring decisions had to be made, disagreements developed over who should be extended an offer. In part, this reflected differing views of the identity of the department, as well as what constituted worthy research. As commonly happens in academic departments, some of the faculty also shared the perception that the department did not appreciate or reward them in ways that were commensurate with their record of grants and publications. This perception may have been reinforced by the difficult times Oklahoma and OSU faced financially during the 1980s, when low and stable salaries at OSU were pinched by high inflation rates.

Beginning around 1984, several tenured or tenure-track geography faculty left the department, ostensibly for very good career moves. Butler and Walsh



**Figure 4.** Geography faculty and graduates following commencement in May 1984. Front row (left to right): Robert Norris, John Vitek, John Rooney, Nick Connelly, Stephen Stadler, Keith Harries, Stephen Tweedie, James Stine, David Butler, George Malanson, and Richard Hecock. On the stairs: Melanie Brown, Beverly Arkeketa, Jim Doerner, Chris Kinder, Belkys Jatar, and Todd Schara. Photo courtesy OSU Department of Geography.

moved on to other institutions, Malanson's position was not extended, and Vitek shifted from the geography department to geology at OSU, eventually becoming associate dean of the Graduate College and vice president for academic affairs. The net effect of these departures, however, was to significantly diminish physical geography and temporarily slow expansion in the use and teaching of geographic techniques.

Since these events, the faculty hired in the department generally have had research expertise in resource management or in cultural/historical geography. In 1985, M. Richard Hackett was hired in a visiting position. He was a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma (OU) whose research concentrated on the geopolitical evolution of the Navajo. Following the conversion of his position to "instructor" in 1986, he assumed the duties of undergraduate advising in the department and continued in that capacity until 1992. During that time, the number

of majors increased from 24 to 58, an increase that was propelled in large measure by his recruitment efforts (OSU Student Academic Services, pers. comm.).

In 1986, Louis Seig (Ph.D. Minnesota 1968) joined the department. His expertise included the geography of energy, and he had ongoing research projects involving the spatial aspects of Navajo–Hopi land disputes. When James Curtis (Ph.D. UCLA 1978) joined the faculty in 1988, he brought additional expertise in cultural and urban geography, with regional specializations in Latin America and the U.S.–Mexico borderlands.

One of the last personnel actions that occurred during Hecock's tenure as head was the hiring of Thomas Wikle, who joined the faculty in 1989. Wikle contributed expertise in recreation planning and natural resource management. Arriving in Stillwater at the age of twenty-six, Wikle was geography's youngest faculty member. His experience as a cartographer and interest in computer technology made him the department's new "techie." He taught the department's first GIS class and overhauled its computer cartography course. His success in securing NSF-funded equipment grants would facilitate the modernization of the department.

Having served as department head for more than a decade, Hecock stepped down in 1989. He had solidified the gains that the department had made in the 1970s and had worked diligently to establish a strong undergraduate enrollment base in order to improve the cost per student credit hour. To that end, he played a leading role in helping the department create a third introductory course, World Regional Geography, which would complement the existing lower-division introductory courses in cultural and physical geography. World Regional Geography now consistently enrolls more students than any other lower-division course in the department.

Hecock was also steadfast in his efforts to ensure that geography courses remained a key component of the general education requirements that students must satisfy in order to graduate. Today, almost every undergraduate course carries at least one, and often two, general education designations. Enrollments in both upper- and lower-division courses regularly attract students from the various

colleges. Hecock was also instrumental in establishing a new interdisciplinary degree program in environmental science. This program leads to degrees at the master's and Ph.D. levels. Its establishment created additional opportunities for geography faculty to advise graduate students enrolled in the program, including doctoral students. A major consequence of this is that it, together with the Ed.D. program, factored prominently in helping the department to build a case for launching a doctoral program in geography.

Another of Hecock's lasting contributions to the department involves a policy that he devised, with faculty support, which requires all faculty to teach lower-division courses. This ensures that the faculty share the duties of teaching the introductory courses rather than concentrating those duties on a few selected faculty. Hecock also played a leadership role in bringing the Oklahoma Alliance for Geographic Education (OKAGE) to the state in the middle part of the 1980s. Oklahoma was among the first group of states to become part of this alliance network sponsored by the National Geographic Society. He served as co-coordinator with Jim Goodman at OU in an important instance of cooperation between the two institutions. Finally, Hecock succeeded in cultivating good relations with the dean's office and in helping geography to weather, without adverse consequences, those times in the 1980s when the university budget was severely strapped.

During the 1980s, the department was again fortunate to be supported by a very diligent and dedicated staff that included Mark Gregory, Gayle Maxwell, Frances Hayes, Susan Shaul, Tammy Stailie, and Kim Cundiff. Gregory, who had worked for the department in the late 1970s, returned in the 1980s as research associate with CARS. Beginning in 1980, Gayle Maxwell worked for more than two decades as the department's staff cartographer, generating high-quality maps for faculty research projects and publications. Initially hired as an entry-level typist, Shaul attained the rank of senior unit assistant in 1994. The epitome of professionalism and excellence, she unselfishly contributed to many of the department's accomplishments during her twenty-two years of service.

In 1989, following a national search for a department head to replace Hecock, Olen Paul Matthews was hired. He had been a professor at the University of Idaho

prior to accepting the position at OSU, but this would be his first experience as department head. Matthews is one of a handful of geographers who has earned both the J.D. (Idaho 1975) and Ph.D. (Washington 1980). His research centers on water law and policy, and transboundary resource problems, making him a good fit for the department. He was drawn to OSU by its very active master's program, and he considered the department to be a strong candidate for obtaining a Ph.D. program. Matthews also realized that the age-structure of the department was such that there would be a complete transition of the faculty in about a decade. He saw this as a tremendous opportunity.

Matthews served nearly three years as department head. During that time he worked with the faculty to enhance the visibility of the yearly colloquium series by hosting a number of prominent geographers. Among those visiting the department in the early 1990s were Tom Baerwald, Bob Janiskee, John Augelli, Jim Wescoat, John Oliver, Pete Shortridge, and Wilbur Zelinsky.

The addition of two new faculty during Matthews' tenure also changed the complexion of the department somewhat. Stephen Higley, an economic geographer with an M.B.A. (1975) and Ph.D. (1992) from the University of Illinois, taught courses in marketing geography, urban planning, and regional analysis. Bryan Baker (Ph.D. Minnesota 1991), a biogeographer interested in habitat mapping and management for conservation, joined the department in 1991.

Matthews also succeeded in enhancing geography's acquisition of computer equipment and technology. One of the first efforts in that area involved CARS. In 1989, CARS was still administratively and physically separate from the department. Matthews acted on an opportunity to acquire CARS and house it in geography. In the process, he oversaw the transition from the use of the minicomputer in CARS to the acquisition of workstations. With this physical relocation, CARS lost its status as an independent research center and became more of a service facility with the dual roles of supporting faculty instruction and research projects and acquiring external grants and contracts.

Matthews saw a place for computers in geography, and by promoting GIS and geographic techniques, he moved the department in a new direction. Not all of the

faculty, however, approved of this or of his leadership style. Matthews served as a strong department head, which sometimes caused problems with other faculty. He also struggled with being the outsider in a department with a very tightly knit faculty. For this reason, he may have sometimes seemed aloof to their concerns or less attentive to their collective wisdom. In 1992, following a vote of no confidence by the faculty, he was forced to end his service as department head. Having developed a number of ties in the administration and with various research centers, Matthews was subsequently appointed associate dean of multidisciplinary studies. He also served as director of several research centers, including the Environmental Institute, University Center for Water Research, and Oklahoma Water Resources Research Institute. Nevertheless, his move from the department into administration created a major power vacuum in geography. Unable to agree on a successor or to win the dean's blessing on those recommended, the department turned again to Rooney. In 1992, he commenced his second tenure as department head, though he agreed to serve on a short-term basis only. Because of his other research commitments, he also requested that another faculty member serve as assistant head. Higley assumed that position.

### **Continuity and Change, 1992–2003**

Rooney's second term as head was marked by three noteworthy changes. In 1992, under Rooney's lead, the department hired David Waits, a specialist in agricultural geography with expertise in GIS and remote sensing. Waits (Ph.D. Texas Tech 1991) served as CARS director and was a popular teacher who played a major part in upgrading and enhancing the department's GIS curriculum. As the department's main GIS specialist, however, he became saddled with a teaching load that demanded long hours in the computer lab. Responsibility and oversight of the department's workstations also fell to him, and graduate students regularly sought his guidance on their research projects, giving him a heavy advising load as well. He worked in the department for seven years before leaving academia and establishing a business in software development for precision agriculture.

A second important development was the establishment, at the end of 1992, of



a statewide weather observation system known as the Oklahoma Mesonet. The Mesonet consists of more than 100 sites around the state that have been fitted with instrumentation to collect environmental and atmospheric data. Measurements are made almost continuously, every day of the year. The Mesonet was the product of a collaboration of scientists at OSU and OU. Stadler was one of the Mesonet founders and serves on the steering committee that runs the network. Once established, the Mesonet gave Oklahoma one of the nation's premier automated data-gathering networks for environmental conditions.

The third noteworthy development was the official renaming of the building that housed the department. The department had been located in the old Home Economics Building. Much to the consternation of the faculty, geography's physical presence on campus was disguised, making it difficult for people to find the department. On several occasions in the past, during Rooney's first tenure as department head, he had attempted to get the administration to change the name of the building to "Geography Building." Higley helped resurrect and lead this cause, and the name change was finally approved some twenty years after the initial request.

Rooney also oversaw two additional hires that would effectively end the Rooney-Hecock reign. Jonathan Comer (Ph.D. Ohio State 1994) and Dale Lightfoot (Ph.D. Colorado 1990) joined the department in 1994, with Comer replacing Hecock, and Lightfoot replacing Rooney. Comer, an economic geographer, has become responsible for the department's economic and quantitative courses. Since 1995, he has also served as the department's undergraduate advisor. Lightfoot's expertise in traditional agriculture and water technology has led to funded research projects in Morocco, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, and Uzbekistan, bringing new international expertise in resource management from the perspective of cultural ecology.

The lure of early retirement proved too great for Rooney to resist, and in 1994 he took it, having dedicated twenty-five years of service to geography at OSU. Wikle, who was now thirty-two and had been associate professor for less than a year, succeeded him as department head. The parallels between Rooney and Wikle are striking. Wikle's youthfulness and energy also rejuvenated the department. He

was very committed to enhancing the department and enormously supportive of his colleagues, frequently providing wise counsel and encouragement. He possessed an impressive grant and publication record that included innovative work with Guy Bailey, former English department head, in dialect geography. Wikle also oversaw the faculty turnover that Matthews had envisioned. New hires completely changed the makeup of the department but maintained its emphases in cultural/historical geography and resource management.

A parallel development that helped the department take stock of its strengths and weakness was the dean's request for an external review of the department. This was the first time such a comprehensive assessment of the department had ever been performed. In 1995, Gordon Matzke of Oregon State University, Duane Nellis of Kansas State University, and Wilbur Zelinsky of Pennsylvania State University served as the outside reviewers. One of their main recommendations was that the department should address the problem of faculty retention, particularly in the areas of techniques and resource management. A related problem that the reviewers identified was the department's lack of female and minority faculty. The reviewers also found the computer labs, which still used 386 computers, inadequate for the then state-of-the-art techniques in GIS, remote sensing, and computer mapping (Matzke, Nellis, and Zelinsky 1995).

The external review also highlighted many of the department's successes. These included the reputation of its senior faculty, and the department's national image. When compared with the other seventy-nine departments offering master's degrees, but excluding those offering the Ph.D., OSU ranked in the top six in terms of its professional reputation. The department was also commended for being one of the few graduate departments to consistently utilize senior faculty to teach lower-division courses (Matzke, Nellis, and Zelinsky 1995).

Geography was applauded for its ability to support and enhance the university's mission through the establishment of its unique concentration on cultural/historical geography and resource management. In fact, the external review specifically cautioned the department to avoid "mission creep" caused by individual faculty seeking to redirect the department to support their specific

interests (Matzke, Nellis, and Zelinsky 1995). Considering the faculty turnover that was about to occur, the timing of this review was auspicious and helped to clarify the department's objectives.

Between 1994 and 1999, Wikle led the department through seven national searches to fill positions vacated through retirements or departures. Six of the seven faculty hired as a result of those searches remain in the department today. Brad Bays (Ph.D. Nebraska 1996), a historical geographer with interests in indigenous peoples, especially Native Americans, was hired to replace the retiring Seig. In 1996, Allen Finchum (Ph.D. Tennessee 1992) and Alyson Greiner (Ph.D. Texas 1996) joined the department. Finchum brought considerable experience in applied urban geography, GIS, and transportation planning. His knowledge of sports has also enabled him to revive the course in the geography of sport, which had not been taught since Rooney's retirement. His technical expertise was especially valuable as the department continued expanding and upgrading its GIS and techniques teaching facilities. Greiner, a cultural and historical geographer with a regional specialization in Australia, was hired to fill the position vacated by Curtis, and, along with Bays, has continued the department's close relationship with the Oklahoma Historical Society begun by Carney.

In 1997, Carlos Cordova (Ph.D. Texas 1997) joined the department. He is a physical geographer with specializations in geomorphology and geoarchaeology, and has field experience in the Middle East and Black Sea regions. Cordova also created the Geoarchaeology and Quaternary Palynology Laboratory, bringing a new dimension to techniques in geography instruction and research not previously available at OSU. The following year, Reuel Hanks (Ph.D. Kansas 1993), a political geographer and Central Asian specialist, was hired to fill the position created by Tweedie's retirement. Mahesh Rao (Ph.D. Oklahoma State 1996) and Michael Myers (Ph.D. Texas 1998) joined the department in 1998 and 1999, respectively. Rao is a specialist in remote sensing and its applications to agriculture and has, since his arrival in the department, directed and reinvigorated CARS. Myers is a cultural and political ecologist with interests in agriculture and sustainable development and contributes expertise in GIS, GPS, and field techniques.

A number of others worked in the geography department in the 1990s, including Irene Ng (Ph.D. UCLA 1992), Dean Lambert (Ph.D. Texas 1992), A. M. Shajaat Ali (Ph.D. Clark 1987), John Grolle (Ph.D. Michigan State 1995), Deborah Salazar (Ph.D. Texas 1995), and Youngsinn Sohn (Ph.D. Utah 1994). In 1999, Richard Marston (Ph.D. Oregon State 1980) joined the OSU School of Geology as Sun Chair. A geographer with research expertise in geomorphology and environmental geology, Marston also serves as an adjunct professor in the geography department and contributes in important ways as a member of graduate student research committees. Other key personnel include Joe Seig, who in 1992 became the coordinator of CARS, and Bruce Battles who succeeded him in 1999. That same year, LeAnn Jones also joined the departmental office staff and has since been promoted to senior unit assistant. Our newest staff member, Stacey Frazier, has already rendered yeoman service to the department (Figure 5).

As department head, Wikle also played a leading role in helping geography upgrade its facilities and address the concerns identified by the external review. He worked diligently with others in the department to secure equipment grants or instructional improvement grants, with great success. Wikle, Waits, Stadler, and Lightfoot collaborated on several different grants that were funded by the NSF. A major NSF grant, for example, paid for the renovation and modernization of facilities for GIS and remote sensing research. Significantly, the department moved into a new building in 1996. This building, which was once a dormitory, was not networked and did not possess classroom space. The timing of this grant was therefore critical, as it made possible the renovation of space to be used for instructional labs. From 1994 to 1997, subsequent NSF grants enabled Wikle to establish a GPS basestation in the department, and with Stadler and Lightfoot, to establish a computer lab for the purposes of utilizing simulation software to enhance instruction in geography.

Wikle also helped to raise the department's profile. He was highly successful in securing start-up investments and competitive salaries for new faculty. He also played a leading role in helping to increase the department's contribution to both general education and other degree programs through its technical courses and

through the establishment of a GIS Certificate option for students. In 1996, following a separation of introductory and advanced GIS coursework and a widening of departmental GIS offerings to include both socio-economic and natural resources applications, the department received formal approval to offer a GIS Certificate. Departmental GIS courses remain popular in academic programs across OSU, attracting students in other majors such as forestry and zoology. The GIS Certificate is now the largest enrollment certificate at OSU, with nearly as many awardees in a single year as all others offered in the College of Arts and Sciences. Wikle also greatly facilitated the department's acquisition of the *Journal of Cultural Geography* in 1996, when Seig assumed editorship.

Diverse social gatherings throughout the year, including an annual faculty-student softball game, and an international beer, wine, and cheese party, contribute to the sense of community in the department. Many current geography students also participate in events that are jointly organized by the members of Gamma



**Figure 5.** Geography faculty and staff in August 2003. Front row (left to right): Thomas Wikle, Allen Finchum, Dale Lightfoot, Jonathan Comer, George Carney. Middle row: Mahesh Rao, Alyson Greiner, Stacey Frazier, LeAnn Jones. Back row: Bruce Battles, Michael Larson, Michael Myers, Carlos Cordova, Reuel Hanks, and Stephen Stadler. Not pictured: Brad Bays, Shannon Hall, and Eric Hardy. Photo courtesy OSU Department of Geography.

Theta Upsilon and the OSU Geography Club. These organizations have a long history of activity that has involved coordinating events during Geography Awareness Week, visiting nearby high schools and colleges to help recruit undergraduate and graduate students interested in geography, and sponsoring social activities such as float trips on the Illinois River. Together, these organizations and activities contribute to a strong sense of camaraderie among students.

In the early 1990s, the department implemented term limits for the department head. Following the successful completion of the maximum service of two consecutive three-year terms, Wikle stepped down as head. Since that time, he has served as associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. When Lightfoot succeeded Wikle as department head in the spring of 2000, seven of the twelve faculty were assistant professors, two were associate professors, and three were full professors. Since that time, five of the seven assistant professors have been promoted and tenured. During Lightfoot's tenure, the department has matured considerably.

A savvy and confident leader, Lightfoot has found constructive ways to parlay existing departmental resources into more productive enterprises. The department's Cartography Services operation, converted in 1994 by Lightfoot and Wikle from a manual cartography office to a computer-based graphics production facility, has grown significantly under the direction of Michael Larson. In addition to providing faculty support, it has become a popular graphics support facility across campus and has expanded into contract consulting and production services with non-OSU entities. In recent years, Cartography Services has provided the cartographic needs to support a major Oklahoma soil mapping project undertaken by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Lightfoot has also been a tremendous spokesperson for the department. He has continued the effort, initiated by Wikle, to raise the department's profile within the College of Arts and Sciences and in the dean's office. From an administrative standpoint, their cumulative effort highlighted the department's successes and burnished its image. This became immensely important when the department began to actively pursue approval to offer a doctoral program in geography, in part

because the department's ability to sustain such a program was never questioned. In June 2002, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education formally approved the department's doctoral program in geography. The geography department at OSU became the fifty-fourth program offering doctoral study in the country. Geography also became the first new Ph.D. program created within the College of Arts and Sciences at OSU in twenty years. The doctoral program has retained the department's longstanding emphases on cultural/historical geography and resource management, but has also added a new focus in transportation geography.

### **Conclusion**

Proficiency in human and physical geography has long been expected of students at OSU, and instruction in geography on the Stillwater campus dates to the 1890s. Geography at OSU was initially considered a business science, and coursework in commercial geography became part of the program requirements established by the School of Commerce. The hiring of Pete Burrill in 1930 brought the first professionally trained geographer to campus. His successes in teaching and research enabled him to expand the number of geography courses offered, which provided leverage for hiring additional faculty to teach those courses. The geography department was formally established in the School of Commerce in the early 1940s, but was merged with geology for more than a decade during the 1950s and 60s.

Beginning in 1969, geography regained its autonomy as a fully independent department within the College of Arts and Sciences. Under Rooney's leadership, the number of full-time faculty lines was increased, and the master's program was reinstated. Since that time, the department has experienced considerable growth in the graduate program—growth that is largely tied to the acquisition of external funding and successful grantsmanship.

Several notable trends have emerged that will continue to influence the department. Geography at OSU has been recognized for its leadership in managing digital data. In particular, Finchum has been instrumental in helping establish within the department the Oklahoma Center for Geospatial Information (OCGI).

OCGI is a Federal Geographic Data Committee-affiliated Web site that also provides data to "The National Map," a massive data-sharing site sponsored by the U.S. Geological Survey. Significantly, OCGI provides access to more than forty kinds of spatial data relevant to Oklahoma.

Faculty in the department are much more active in international research today, and there is more intradepartmental faculty collaboration on grants now than ever before. In addition, the number and size of grant awards has increased considerably. In the past, there were a handful of faculty who were the department's primary grant winners. Today a much larger percentage of geography faculty—often 100 percent in any given year—have grants.

Geography faculty continue to garner awards for excellence in teaching, research, and advising. The department has a high percentage of faculty who have won the National Council for Geographic Education Distinguished Teaching Award, including Carney, Wickle, Lightfoot, Greiner, Bays, and Hanks. Carney and Wickle also have been recognized with Regents Distinguished Teaching Awards, while Carney was awarded the Oklahoma Foundation for Teaching Excellence Award. Four faculty in the department—Lightfoot, Bays, Hanks, and Cordova—have won the Arts and Sciences Faculty Council Junior Faculty Award for scholarly excellence. As a result of his outstanding work as undergraduate advisor, Comer received the OSU Award for Excellence in Advisement.

OSU geographers continue to maintain the national and international visibility of the department through their roles as journal editors. In the late 1980s, John Rooney and Richard Pillsbury founded, edited, and published *Sport Place*. In 1996, Seig assumed editorship of the *Journal of Cultural Geography*. That journal is now ranked as one of the leading journals for cultural geographers (Smith 2003). Since 2002, Greiner has edited the journal. Hanks also brought the editorship of the *Journal of Central Asian Studies* with him when he joined the faculty in 1997.

In 2002, this department became the newest Ph.D.-granting department in the United States. In its first year of operation, the doctoral program enrolled seven students, increasing to twelve by its second year. The department anticipates the acquisition of additional faculty lines in the near future and is experiencing an-



other period of significant growth. Geography at OSU remains poised to continue its excellence in teaching, research, and extension well into the future.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This history is dedicated to the memory of Susan Shaull, a long-time staff member and senior unit assistant, whose careful departmental record-keeping greatly facilitated this project. She died in March 2003 at the age of 39.

<sup>2</sup>The exact date of the department's establishment remains a bit of a mystery. The official, but undocumented, position of the Department of Geography is that it was created in 1940. However, Kincaid (1987) dates the department to 1941 but does not substantiate his claim. Blouet and Stitcher (1981) also use 1941. The college catalog published in 1942 appears to be the first to list geography as a separate department, lending some credence to the 1941 date (OAMC 1942). Sadly, the minutes of the State Board of Agriculture between 1938 and 1942 do not record this historic event.

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