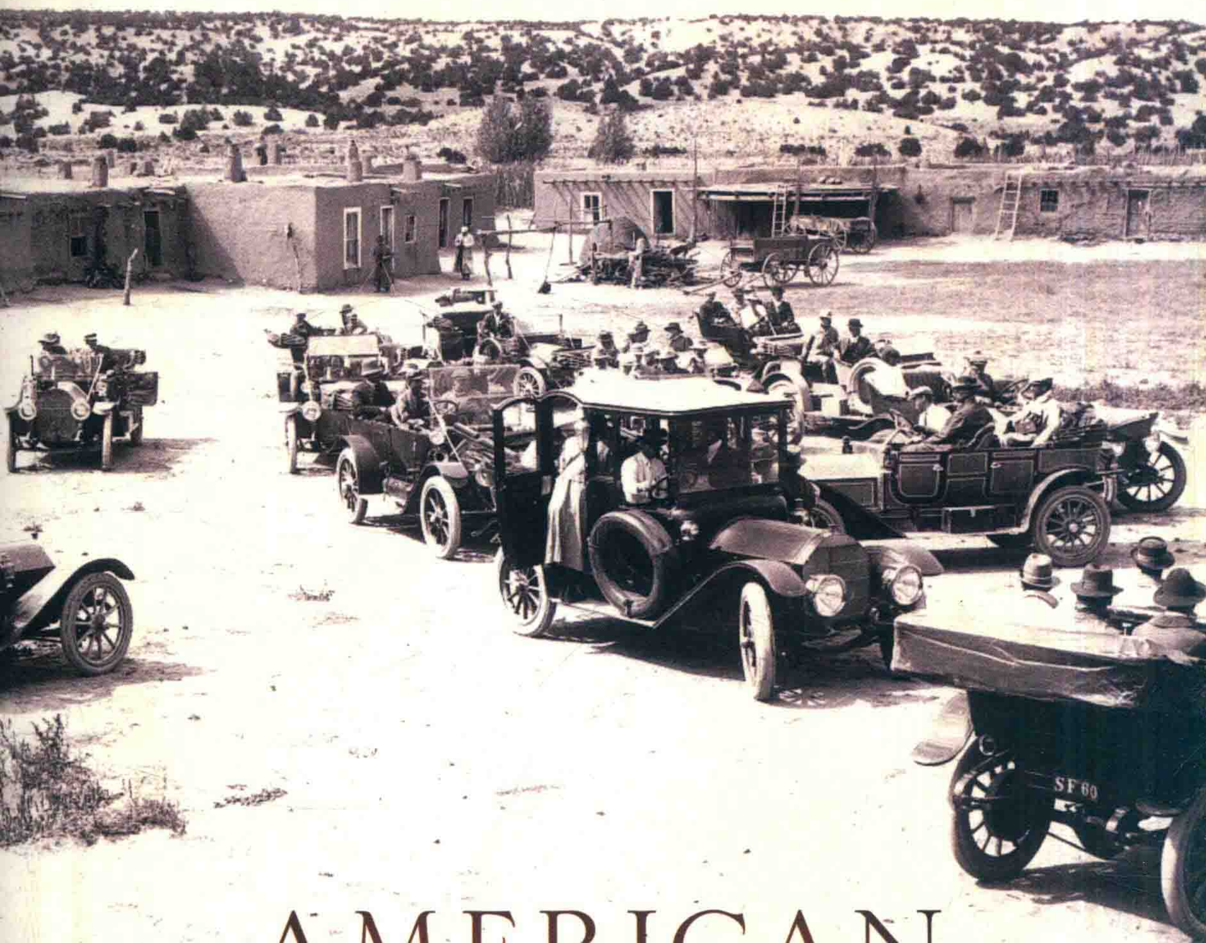

AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHERS

Toward Geographical Science

GEOFFREY J. MARTIN

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TOWARD GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCE

Geoffrey J. Martin

OXFORD
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Oxford University Press is a department of the
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Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
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Published in the United States of America by
Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Martin, Geoffrey J.
American geography and geographers : toward geographical science
/ Geoffrey Martin : with the assistance of T.S. Martin
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-19-533602-3 (alk. paper)
1. Geography—Study and teaching (Higher)—United States—History.
2. United States—Geography—Study and teaching—History.
3. Geographers—United States—History. I. Title.
G76.5.U5M37 2014
910.71'173—dc23 2014038563

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY
AND GEOGRAPHERS

To Michael J. Wise
Scholar, Teacher, and
Friend of Geography

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PREFACE

Geography, not lending itself readily to definition, may perhaps be conceived as a sequence of acquired knowledge revealed by nature, illuminated by the chronology of its historic course. It is happily pervasive in the affairs of people and, through time, has been more readily expressed in subtle and quiet ways rather than in the manner of the exact sciences. This pervasiveness continues to concern itself with people, their activities, the earth, and their ongoing interaction.

The intention of this undertaking has been to render a history of our acquisition and dispersal of geographic knowledge in the United States reaching essentially from the post–Civil War period to the 1960s, this history to be derived as much as possible from archival sources, thereby allowing the participants in this pageant to speak for themselves, even if only in a distant and limited manner. Revealed is the way in which the field of geography as practiced in the United States has enfolded itself upon society—enabling its citizenry to see cosmos and not chaos in the firmament. The larger purpose of this type of investigation is to understand what has gone before, to comprehend how progress has been made in the advancement of structured thought, and how such a body of knowledge in its evolution led to creation of a discipline.

Practitioners of the discipline are anxious to confirm the history of our field of learning: to know what is borrowed, loaned, or shared, and the points of both genesis and dispersal. These are matters of great interest to both the geographer and the historian of science. The careers and accomplishments of geographers may be joined in a continuous narrative with the accomplishment of geographical societies, national and international congresses, geographical journals, books and other publications, university departments, courses, theses, dissertations, and so on. Yet it is largely from the correspondence

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saved by individuals or archived by institutions that a legitimate history may be retrieved. From such a source, new thought may be generated, new notions minted, and other thought, perhaps based on hearsay or lore, may be revised.

Archival detail provides data which are frequently not otherwise available. If such data are in the form of a letter, they are tied to a date, which provides a measure of exactitude also not otherwise available. Given this arrangement of things, those who work in recent times usually have more collected correspondence to study than those who lived at an earlier time. This explains in good measure why this study is heavily larded with thought derived from letters of a time now past; collections have been made, materials put into a logical order, and facilities provided for viewing them made available. The resultant narrative is made more accurate and otherwise enhanced; primacy of the archive is an essential in the reconstruction of the history of geography, and, indeed, of science.

For the geographer, knowledge of the evolution of our science is prerequisite to a larger comprehension. It is part of the saga of intellection to comprehend the path our forebears trod. As a guild we have passed through the appropriate stages (selection of a subject matter, intellectual inquiry, development of a scientific viewpoint, establishment of a profession, and formation of a discipline). Delineation and recognition of our accomplishment adds to the appreciation of our contemporary standing in the pantheon of both "hard" and "soft" sciences.

To comprehend at least some of the many paths trod, the author traveled to numerous countries consulting more than 150 archival deposits in all. Most of these deposits were institutionalized, while others were privately held. This allowed the author to consult data available perhaps nowhere else and to comprehend exchanges between unlikely or little-known partners in correspondence, which facilitates understanding of larger matters. Letters were written by the author to many of the elders of the profession commencing in 1959. In this way one could reach back to the end of the nineteenth century (and the early twentieth century) and correspond with the likes of J. Russell Smith, R. LeMoyne Barrett, Charles C. Colby, Carl

O. Sauer, T. Griffith Taylor, Marcel Aurousseau, Roy Nash, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, and many others. One of the most valuable activities in this regard was to secure lists of one-time students in the classes of M. S. W. Jefferson, Ypsilanti, Michigan, and similar lists for Bowman and Huntington at Yale. (In earlier times, registrars would provide access to the most recent addresses available for this group.) Correspondence then ensued with numbers of one-time students of these teachers. Letters of considerable intellectual value were generated in this way. Correspondence or private meetings (or both) with those who have gone before releases into the stream of the known so much previously retained in the privacy of unspoken minds that more undertakings of this sort seem both vital and necessary. (These are private conversations, to be distinguished from films made of individuals who provide statements; of course, both sources of information have their space in this large enterprise.) For example, while there were still troubles in Vietnam, American Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker in Saigon found time to write, "I did have a very interesting, indeed quite fascinating, course in geography under Isaiah Bowman. I remember him as one of the outstanding teachers of my undergraduate days, original in his method and stimulating in his approach, always trying to draw out students to think through problems on their own" (letter, Ellsworth Bunker to Geoffrey Martin, February 25, 1969 [GM]).

Brief essays concerning U.S. geography and geographers flowered into works of a biographical persuasion concerning Mark S. W. Jefferson (1968), Ellsworth Huntington (1973), and Isaiah Bowman (1980), which represented a tripartite emergence and growth continuing from the physiography of William Morris Davis. Jefferson provided anthropography; Huntington offered study of the component parts of civilization (environment, genetics, and cultural inheritance); Bowman offered the study of area as exemplified in regional geography. There followed much work concerning the history of the persons collectively known as The Inquiry; the Paris Peace Conference negotiations; the collection, restoration, and publication of Jefferson's Paris Peace Conference Diary; and correspondence and meetings with some of those persons still with us at that time. Then

came work leading to the study of seventy-five years of the Association of American Geographers (1979) and two substantial revisions of *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas* (1993 and 2005), punctuated by numerous articles concerning the history of geography, archival accumulations, and biobibliographies.

Prior to that time came the initiation of more than twenty consecutive years in which Richard Hartshorne and myself met once or twice a year for one or two days per session. The exception to this was a three-day session when he had come to my house to "dictate his obituary." These sessions involved exchanges concerning a variety of matters in the history of geographic thought. They became quite intense with the passage of time. Dick Hartshorne was fascinated with the idea that the author had commenced an archival collection on the history of American geography and had already suggested creation of an institutionalized archive to gather, save, and centralize what would become a national collection. This was in 1964, when the collection was young; the author placed an essay in *The Professional Geographer* concerning the need for a central place of deposit for geographical materials that were otherwise without an obvious home.

Meanwhile, manuscript advanced: more articles were written and published. The two Germanys had been traversed in quest for relevant archival matter, which took two summers. Another summer was invested in looking through some French archival holdings, British holdings, and the Jovan Cvijić collection in Belgrade. Later, time was spent in talks about the history of geography and archival holdings in Britain with R. P. Beckinsale, R. J. Chorley, and T. W. Freeman and visits to Owen Lattimore, G. H. T. Kimble, and others. Then came a visit to Australia, where Patrick Armstrong had arranged for me to view the holdings of Marcel Aurousseau in Nedlands, then to the Australian National Library, Canberra, there to view Aurousseau and T. G. Taylor holdings.

Much journeying had already taken the author to numerous archival deposits in a number of other countries. It was in this collective experience that the destination of a number of letters from America was revealed. When the letter was written by hand, a copy usually did not exist. Later came the typed letter, with the

possibility of two copies. Sometimes the identical letter was at both ends of the exchange (sender and receiver), and, interestingly, on occasion the letter received had been changed by the typist's hand (sender), occasionally revealing an afterthought of significance. Sometimes the author had destroyed their correspondence; sometimes an individual would arrange their papers in a most exacting manner and arrange for their disposal when the time came. Too frequently, however, institutional archives, or those of individuals at home, have been destroyed in time of war, by relocation (when father's papers might be taken to the dump), or by factors such as dampness over time, vermin, and the like. With the coming of e-mail, a new threat to archival holding is perceived, namely that communications may not be saved with care, or saved at all.

*

This work takes the reader through the early trekking of American would-be scholars to Germany in search of geologist-geographer credentials. While in Western Europe, they were able to recognize the value of the normal schools which had taken hold of emerging systems of education. They returned to the United States from Europe to build an educational phalanx ranging especially from the fundamental grammar school to the normal school, and, a little later, the university. Although sparse and spare, these institutions constituted the genesis of what would become the largest educational system in the world.

The history, growth, and role of geography in some fourteen American universities is traced in the early part (ca. 1895–1928) of the period under examination, accompanied by enumeration of those courses dominating the curriculum at that time. Interesting are those courses offered for the first time in the nation. It was the "region" that began to emerge in college catalogs during the 1890s which was, in time, to replace physiography as the dominant. It grew first as a study in physiographic provinces, then as physiographic regions. Its partner, the geographic region, began to appear at the same time, with special reference to the United States or North America; soon regional courses were available for many parts of the world. Africa and Australia were the two areas that lagged behind

all other "world regions"; frequently an "Africa and Australia" course would be listed in the catalog, although rarely offered. It seems that the polar world never was developed as a regular geography course in the U.S. university system in the period studied.

Courses in commercial and industrial geography began in some geography departments; courses in economic geography were also offered in geography departments, frequently encouraged by economists. This began to help redress the balance vis-à-vis the physiographic domination accomplished by Davis in curricula across the country. Forms of environmental control, traveling under different titles, became popular in the 1900–1930 period. This became the subject of some emphasis during the period of World War I, by the end of which geographers were struggling with the quest for definition: what exactly was the task of the geographer? While environmentalism was subjected to considerable criticism from the early 1920s, a core of believers continued in their faith for decades.

Following World War I, the Hispanic American Millionth Map, studies in the science of settlement, associated ecology, and problems in political geography constituted a set of investigations that benefited from propinquity each with the other. Studies of the Hispanic Map, of pioneer and other settlement, and of political geography found common cause in the matter of political boundaries. The Millionth Map had its origin at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 when Secretary of State Robert Lansing was anxious to resolve the Guatemala-Honduras and Tacna-Arica disputes; the spread of pioneer settlement confronted problems regarding international boundaries, and political geography was given largely to the study of such boundaries from World War I until a number of years after World War II.

Then came Hartshorne's *The Nature of Geography* (1939) and *Perspective on the Nature of Geography* (1959). Once again geographers entered into another period of reflection involving an ongoing quest for definition and an indefinite summation to the question: what is geography? Perhaps it was a newer geography, the product of wartime studies, that encouraged reconsideration of the nature of geography in the post-1945 period by a younger geographic community. While Hartshorne's *Perspective* was not published until

1959, a younger community was thinking the matter through, discussing it with each other, exchanging correspondence, and thereby slowly changing the face of American geography. Already "The Young Geographers" had been formed as a group separate from the Association of American Geographers, and had created its own very rigorous program. They offered more services, enrolled vastly more members than the older organization, and via amalgamation with the Association changed the nature and extended the functions of that staid group. The two organizations, of different ages and different geographic experiences, came together in common quest for an agreed understanding if not definition of the field. In this context, graduate school seminars seemed to provide, both by leadership and composition, a common ground in which the two groups were able to find some measure of common accord.

Of larger moment was that the war had interrupted Hartshorne's locus extending from *Nature* to *Perspective*. Yet the war provided a space for discussion, for geographers talking with geographers. The relocation of displaced persons and geographic assistance with regard to terms of settlement were part of the geographers' contribution to real world problems. With the passage of time, incremental gains in many fields of learning encouraged the quest for definition of geography, which would remain part of the larger undertaking. The process of groping forward from percept to concept was one of the ways in which definition of the American geographical scene was attempted. Such an undertaking remains largely unwritten and unsung, but something of the raw material of this enterprise resides in the penultimate chapter of this work.

"Envoi," the concluding chapter, embraces the letters of a day now passed—messages from the grave, written in the time of a less hurried world. These have been gathered from a large variety of sources, both formally and informally maintained. Less formal sources have been invaluable, including informally held archives by participants in the professional machinery, not to mention private meetings with a considerable number of individuals ready and able to talk or correspond about geography's past. Citing what has previously been written, now anchored in archival holdings, is invaluable exposition of what was once the reality. Numerous relevant

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