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OFFICERS

2002

President
Dr. Catherine Lockwood
Department of Geography
Chadron State College
Chadron, NE 69337
clockwood@csc.edu

First Vice-President
Dr. Carol Rosen
Department of Geography
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Whitewater, WI 52190
rosenc@post.uww.edu

Second Vice-President
Dr. Leon Yacher
Department of Geography
Southern Connecticut State University
New Haven, CT 06515-1355
yacher@southernct.edu

Executive Secretary
Dr. Virgil Holder
Geography and Earth Science
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
La Crosse, WI 54601
holder.virg@uwlox.edu

Comptroller
Dr. Leon Hallman
Division of Continuing Education
Stephen F. Austin State University
Nacogdoches, TX 75962-6111
lhallman@sfasu.edu

Historian
Dr. Orland Maxfield
533 North Willow
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(501) 442-4707

Student Representatives
Dawn Drake
Department of Geography and Regional Planning
Indiana University
Indiana, PA 15705

Nancy Middlebrook
Department of Geography
Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, TX 78666

Omega Omega (Alumni)
Dr. Richard Earl
Department of Geography
Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, TX 78666
re02@swt.edu

Immediate Past-President
Dr. M. Duane Nellis, Dean
Eberly College of Arts and Science
West Virginia University
Morgantown, WV 26506-6286
dnellis@wvu.edu

Editor, The Geographical Bulletin (ex officio)
Dr. C. Nicholas Raphael
Department of Geography and Geology
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
GEO_RAPHAEL@online.emich.edu

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Gamma Theta Upsilon and The Geographical Bulletin

Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) was established in 1928 as a professional geography honor society. The organization was founded by faculty members and students at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois to recognize and promote scholarship in geography. Since its inception 220 chapters of the honor society have been installed, mostly in the United States. Currently the society has over 50,000 members worldwide and will be observing 75 years of service and activity to the profession in 2003.

The symbolism of the society is embodied in the key insignia printed on the front cover of the Geographical Bulletin. The body of the key is seven sided and represents the seven continents of the earth. The Greek letters ITY represent the three great environmental domains of our planet: Ge (Earth), Thalassia (sea), and Hypaithrois (atmosphere). The waves in the center of the key signify the major oceans of the world and the star is symbolic of Polaris, which guided travellers over the lands and oceans of the northern hemisphere for centuries.

The discipline of geography has continuously evolved particularly since 1980. New technologies, rapid and more accurate data retrieval methods, and the expansion of knowledge have continually redefined the parameters of the discipline. Emerging methodologies such as Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and the introduction of numerous new periodicals reflect the stimulation the discipline has recently received. Also, new and creative spatial points of view and the "globalization" agenda enunciated in recent years by governments and industries on the international scene, coupled with the lack of basic geographical knowledge by students and the public at large, have rekindled the teaching of geography in school systems. Educators and the Geographic Alliances are helping to address curriculum issues that are redirecting the discipline and placing it in a more prominent place throughout the nation.

At the university level, as geography expanded, subdisciplines have evolved. Urban Planning, Mountain Environments, Hazards, Military Geography and Global Change are some examples. In the year 2001, the American Association of Geographers (AAG) listed over 50 topical proficiencies and specialty groups of its organization. Also the Association recognizes 95 area or regional proficiencies its members are pursuing. Although "applied" geography has emerged to help solve immediate problems, regional issues continue to hold a wide and professionally active audience.

Gamma Theta Upsilon has responded and has supported these unprecedented changes through scholarships, speakers to university departments and the promotion of research and publication. Currently Gamma Theta Upsilon awards five scholarships to undergraduates, graduating seniors and to a graduate student in the field of geography that hold membership in the society. In cooperation with the AAG the society funds an educational outreach effort through the "Visiting Scientist Program" to Geography Departments in colleges and universities. The Geographical Bulletin publishes articles and reviews of interest to geographers and lay persons alike.

Gamma Theta Upsilon is governed by an elected Executive Board of professional geographers and students as mandated by the Constitution, Bylaws and Procedures of the honor society. It formally convenes twice per year; during the annual meeting of the AAG usually in spring and the annual meeting of the National Council of Geographic Education usually in the fall. As part of its fall agenda a business report is presented by the Officers of Gamma Theta Upsilon to all members of the society in attendance.

The Geographical Bulletin began publication as an outlet for student research in 1970 and is published biannually. Indeed many students who have gone on to graduate school in geography and related fields have had the opportunity to see their first professional publication appear in the Bulletin. To foster and encourage student publication a "Best Student Paper Award" and a fifty dollar prize is annually awarded by Gamma Theta Upsilon. Published articles are selectively abstracted in Current Geographical Publications of the American Geographical Society, Geo-Abstracts and Sociological Abstracts. The publication is housed in approximately 100 libraries.
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Editorial Policy and Instructions to Authors

All manuscripts must be in acceptable form and ready for peer review. Contributions to The Geographical Bulletin of Gamma Theta Upsilon should follow the general specifications noted below:

1. All manuscripts should be double spaced on \(8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 11''\) paper with \(1\frac{1}{2}''\) margins on all sides. Type on one side only. Submit the original and one copy of the manuscript. Use 10 or 12 point type only.

2. References, tables, charts and other graphics such as maps and photographs should be cited parenthetically in the text as follows: (Wilhelm, 1998), (Table 3), or (Fig. 2). If a published statement is quoted use page numbers e.g. (Wilhelm, 1999, p. 3-4). Double space references on a separate page immediately following the text. Footnotes, appendices, postscripts are to be avoided. All references cited in the text should be listed and double spaced alphabetically by author as noted below:


3. All tables and figures must be typed on separate pages, double spaced and referenced by Arabic numerals. Include a list of double-spaced table and figure captions.

4. All line drawings and graphics must be in finished form and suitable for reduction to 7.5 by 5 inches. Maps must have scales, a fine neat line serving as a boundary and patterns which will tolerate reduction. All graphics and photographs will be black and white and of professional quality. Data, images and graphics off the web are not necessarily of publishable quality. It is the author’s responsibility to obtain copyright release in writing to use copyrighted material.

5. An abstract up to 150 words double spaced followed by up to five key words must be included on a separate page. The abstract should state the objective, methods and conclusions of the paper.

6. It is the author’s responsibility to obtain permission to use copyrighted material from papers, books, and the Web. Web page maps/photos are not necessarily reproduction quality.

7. If the manuscript is put on a word processor use the same type style and font size throughout the paper to include all headings and subheadings. Do not italicize books and periodicals. Do not use bold type. Underline these words and they will be typeset in italic type by the printer.

8. It is suggested that student manuscripts be reviewed by a faculty member for editorial comments prior to submission.

Send two copies of all manuscripts to:
Dr. C. Nicholas Raphael, Editor
The Geographical Bulletin
Department of Geography and Geology
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Telephone: (734) 487-8591
Fax: (734) 487-6979
E-mail: GEO_RAPHAEL@online.emich.edu

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INTRODUCTION

More than a decade ago, Geography in America (Gaile and Willmontt, 1989) was released. Among the updates and discussions of geography's systematic subfields, was a chapter assessing the past, present, and future of geography education (Hill and LaPrairie, 1989). That work outlined the progression of geography's place of relative prominence in the early 1900s, to its virtual disappearance in American K-12 education. While the authors pointed to a plethora of challenges, they also noted that geography education was showing signs of new life. Indeed, geography has begun to show up in more and more school classrooms, and geographic literacy has improved. That renaissance in geography education is rooted in work done by countless geography educators, geography alliances, and organizations focused on re-establishing the importance of geography in the schools and in the minds of the American public at large. But although progress has been made, we enter the 21st century faced with many persistent problems that still threaten the future of geography education. The following pages will address some of the indicators by which we might glean information about the current state of geography, as well as some of the ways geographers should proceed to ensure the survival and vitality of the discipline. Where are we now? How should we negotiate the road ahead?

A NEW BENCHMARK

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the nation's most recognized ongoing education survey. For more than 25 years, the NAEP has assessed students' abilities in a variety of subject areas, and has tracked changing levels of educational achievement at grades 4, 8, and 12. Geographers are fortunate to have had geography included in that assessment for the first time in 1994 (National Center for Education Statistics 1996). Those data are important as they represent a benchmark against which to compare future assessments. The future is here. Recently, the
2001 geography assessment results were released. By examining changes in the K–12 geography scores, we are able to get a picture of not only the levels of geography training of K–12 students and teachers, but also of the levels of geography education offered at the college and university level.

Table 1 reports the levels of achievement in geography for the 1994 and 2001 assessments. In 1994, at least a 'Basic' level of achievement in geography was reached by 70% of fourth-graders, 71% of eighth-graders, and 70% of twelfth-graders. A 'Proficient' level of achievement was reached by 22%, 28%, and 27% of those grades respectively. Less than 5% in any grade under study reached levels of understanding of geography that would be considered 'Advanced' (National Center for Education Statistics 2002). In 2001, students displayed some improvement over their achievement in 1994. Results of the latest assessment reveal that 74% of fourth-graders, 74% of eighth-graders, and 71% of twelfth-graders reached 'Basic' levels of geographic competency. 'Proficient' levels of achievement were reached by 21% of fourth-graders, 30% of eighth-graders, and 25% of twelfth-graders. Moreover, 'Advanced' levels of achievement declined or remained the same across all grade levels (National Center for Education Statistics 2002). While Basic levels of achievement in geography increased significantly for fourth- and eighth-graders between 1994 and 2001, no other statistically-significant gains were reached.

The full report of the NAEP Geography assessment (see http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard) examines data at many other levels of observation (e.g., ethnicity and sex). Yet, any way the data are examined, the bottom line is that the efforts made over the last seven years have yielded only marginal improvement. Yes, geography educators have made progress. Bednarz et al. (2002) make clear that improvement has been witnessed in geography's quantitative presence in schools across the country, in its qualitative status as a school subject, and in our understanding of the theory and application of geography in the classroom. Moreover, geography standards projects have given the discipline of geography a more formal framework. Geography education journals such as Journal of Geography, the flagship journal of the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE), highlight research and

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<tr>
<td>Advanced*</td>
<td>3%/2% (1)</td>
<td>4%/4% (0)</td>
<td>2%/1% (-1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proficient**</td>
<td>19%/19% (0)</td>
<td>24%/26% (2)</td>
<td>27%/25% (-2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic***</td>
<td>70%/74% (4)</td>
<td>71%/74% (3)</td>
<td>70%/71% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Basic</td>
<td>30%/26% (4)</td>
<td>29%/26% (3)</td>
<td>30%/29% (1)</td>
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*Denotes superior performance.
**Denotes solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.
***Denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.

classroom ideas related to geography education. Membership in the NCGE has increased, as has attendance of their annual conference which brings together a wide range of people excited about geography education. It appears that Americans’ perception and awareness of geography is changing in positive way. Pre-collegiate geography education is displaying something of a rebirth. College and university geography enrollments and majors are up (Bednarz et al. 2002). NASA’s Mission Geography and the addition of Human Geography in the high school Advanced Placement tests are among prominent efforts that are underway that will not only educate new geographers, but ones that will continue to change the widely-held notion that geographers simply memorize place names.

But, the modest level of improvement, while somewhat encouraging, still indicates that all geographers need to devote even more time to the theory and practice of geography education—a vital cornerstone of the discipline itself. Indeed, we all must acknowledge that, often, good things take time. Yet, we also must not rest long on the laurels of this modest success. Geographers must be patient, intelligent, diligent, and tenacious in their continued efforts to solidify the place of geography in American education. In particular, the following areas are emerging as vitally important for the success of the endeavor.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS
FOR GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION

The somewhat lackluster state of geography education is, in large part, the result of a number of persistent problems. Some of those have been addressed, few of them have been solved. Geographers simply cannot afford to sit around and wait for geography’s reputation and practice to improve. We must make concerted efforts anchored on an agenda that addresses the most important tenets of geography education. Among the most essential areas that need to be addressed are: pre- and in-service teacher training in geography; co-operation within and without; and geography education research.

PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

Recently, the National Geographic Society reported that students whose teachers had received in-depth training in geography content and instruction scored, on average, 4 percent higher than students who had participated in the NAEP study (National Council for Geographic Education, 2002). That fact should not be surprising to many. What is often shocking is the fact that too few people formally acknowledge the relationship between teacher training in geography, and geography test scores and geographic literacy. Geography is a wonderfully engaging and exciting subject that is essential for life. Yet, geography education does not simply “happen.” It is not likely that teachers who have received little or no geography training will feel comfortable teaching geography in any systematic or effective way in their classroom. How can we expect teachers to teach what they have not learned? Thus, could we argue that teacher training is the cornerstone of geography learning and by extension, of the discipline itself? Those who are being trained to teach in our nation’s schools are, at best, only slightly more geographically informed than the generation before them (Natoli and Gritzner, 1988; Marran, 1993; Blackwell, 1995; Hermann, 1995). And presently, the geography education community is generally failing to create and maintain effective teacher preparation programs (Boehm et al., 1994).

Geography as a formal subject is allotted relatively little time in the K–12 curriculum. In addition, most college and university teacher education programs require little in the way of geography training, even for those who will ultimately teach the subject. Thus, a glaring roadblock to geography education continues to manifest itself. Most efforts to remove that burden have been undertaken in the area of improving geography instruction through in-service staff in-
struction (Bednarz and Bednarz, 1995). Thanks in large part to the tireless effort of numerous state geography alliances, many ill-prepared teachers have become more familiar with geography subject matter, as well as the methods by which those concepts might be applied at various grade levels. This represents an essential component of a larger effort to educate the educators about geography. By these efforts, geography has begun to re-establish itself as a recognized school subject, regardless of the frequency with which it is practiced as a subject matter completely separate from the social studies (Donaldson, 2002).

Yet, among the successes born out of our nation's in-service geography education efforts, lies a segment of teacher education that is still woefully weak. Geography education opportunities for pre-service teachers have not improved in scale and scope the way extent its in-service counterpart has. Boehm et al. (1994, P. 90) point out that:

> It is axiomatic that if all we do is provide in-service training in geography for teachers then we institutionalize the continued need for further in-service teacher training in geography! We must fashion effective pre-service programs so that geography teachers of tomorrow are competent, confident, and effective.

Geography education efforts must include ensuring that we witness continued infusions of teachers who are capable of teaching geography in the school setting. In this way, future generations of teachers may approach college geography with less trepidation than most do today. As I will elude to in the following section, one of the persistent impediments to solving the pre-service geography education problem, apart from the fact that geography is not a traditional school subject and is not given the explicit attention of more traditional disciplines, is a lack of cooperation and coordination between geography departments and colleges/schools of education. Geography faculty must take the initiative and make others understand the necessity of training teachers to teach good geography. As college and university geographers take a more proactive approach to highlighting the importance of pre-service geography education, they will also be exercising the vital link between post-secondary geography and K-12 education (Bednarz and Petersen 1994). In my case, I have written a course called "GIS for K-12 Educators," which is aimed outside the geography department per se, at the large numbers of education majors on our campus. In many cases, if we do not advertise geography, people will never naturally gravitate to the discipline.

**CO-OPERATION WITHIN AND WITHOUT**

Most will agree that the geography community must continue to make great strides in the way of research, marketing, and the like in order to ensure its rightful place among other disciplines and as a respected element of the American culture. Indeed, it is not only K-12 geography that is given less than its due. Geographers, in general, often feel the need to legitimize what much of the United States considers little more than a science of locating places. The last thing geography needs is division in its own ranks. Yet, there remains a split within the geography community between researchers, who typically identify with the Association of American Geographers (AAG), and practitioners, who identify with the NCGE (Bednarz et al. 2002). Geographers at all levels must unite to not only wave the flag for the discipline, but to coalesce to greater degrees in an attempt to lay a better foundation for the future of geography education.

Geographers have always classified their discipline as rather holistic, taking pride in the fact that an understanding of geography necessarily requires understanding of a multi-faceted and cross-disciplinary subject matter. However, the efforts of most geography educators have not adequately reflected that *modus operandi*. Indeed, while there have always been a contingent of geography educators who were willing to work hand-in-hand to see that geography was
represented in the social sciences, there have been just as many who have continually and steadfastly strived for an exclusive niche for geography in K–12 education. That attitude is not of recent vintage. For, when the social studies movement of the early 1900’s began, geographers were reluctant to allow their discipline to be placed into that framework on the basis that geography was not a social study. The correctness of that assessment is of little importance here. Rather, the true significance lies in the implications of such opinion. In fact, many geographers have studied the effects of geographers’ refusal to participate in the social studies movement (Hill and LaPrairie, 1989) and submit that:

Geographers did not gain a prominent role in the early stage of the social studies movement. In fact, quite the contrary occurred. Non-geographers accepted responsibility for the geographic strand of the social studies curriculum. Those individuals often lacked training in and knowledge of geography, and frequently made basic errors in information and map presentation. Rather than come to the rescue of the discipline, professional geographers withdrew and became increasingly critical of the poor examples of geography in the social studies (Stoltman and Libbee, 1988, p. 25).

Recently geography education has enjoyed slightly greater levels of collaboration between geography educators and practitioners in other disciplines to ensure that spatial concepts are illustrated throughout the school curriculum. An examination of the list of contributors to Geography for Life: National Geography Standards (Geography Education Standards Project, 1994) will quickly reveal the wide range of disciplinary affiliation and academic levels of those who have produced the most comprehensive content framework to date for geography education. More and more geography educators are realizing both the necessity and the value of collaboration with other disciplines within the social sciences. Yet, as Bednarz et al. (2002) suggest, the awkward relationship between geography and other academic disciplines, most notably, the pre-service education establishment, continues to pose problems for the preparation of good geography instruction in the schools. Geography may never gain the status of the traditional core subject matter, regardless of its inclusion in Goals 2000: The Educate America Act. Thus, for geography to remain on the lips of educators and the American public, geography educators must maintain and strengthen ties with other disciplines, as well as look beyond the strict tenets such as the ideal geography content in K–12 classrooms and engage in research that will examine geography education in the context of major themes in education research.

GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION RESEARCH

An important element in the renaissance of geography education is an increasing body of geography education research. A review of such work accomplished over the past decade reveals a broadening in scope and scale of projects ranging from assessments of map skills and environmental perception to curriculum design and teacher education. On one hand, it is exciting to see an increase in the number of people who are interested in geography education research. As well, it is comforting to note that the diversity of those inquiries is increasing. But, as many have noted (see Bednarz et al. 2000; and Downs, 1994), that total body of research can be criticized for 1) the number of participants, 2) a lack of longitudinal studies, 3) studies that rarely employ a formal experimental design, and 4) its largely descriptive or anecdotal nature. In order for geography education research to be taken more seriously by geographers themselves, let alone the larger academic community, efforts need to be made to place geography education research more systematically into a structured, scientific framework. Downs (1994, p. 129) warned some time ago that:

... much of the existing work in geography education fails to meet generally
accepted research standards in terms of design, execution, and reporting. There are too many one-of-a-kind, ad hoc studies that do not lead to a cumulative understanding of essential phenomena. Therefore, we [geography educators] need to pay attention to the basics of the empirical method: sample selection, hypothesis formulation, data quality, statistical analysis, reporting requirements, research ethics, etc.

If geography educators do not make more concerted efforts to add empirical, longitudinal studies to our body of research, we may run the risk of being marginalized in the larger academic research community. More importantly, we may never realize the powerful implications of constructing future geography education efforts on a body of solid research. In some cases, geography educators need to simply publish and otherwise share the research they are already doing.

Due largely to that lack of formal geography education research, many of the past and present efforts of geography educators are not supported by empirical data (Downs, 1994; Bettis, 1995). Surely, countless geography educators have devised and tested numerous ways of conveying geographic concepts and assessing student comprehension of that material. Yet, rarely have the effects of those efforts been identified, or when identified, placed into a coherent research framework which could be consulted by subsequent research. Although outlets like the annual meetings of the NCGE and its flagship journal, Journal of Geography have historically offered opportunities for geography educators to exchange research findings and classroom techniques, presentation of material in a public forum and publishing in a professional journal is often either beyond the expertise of many geography educators, or simply requires too much time. Consequently, it is likely that much substantive work aimed at improving geography education has simply been concealed and is thus unable to formally contribute to many geography education efforts.

Downs (1995, p. 127) submits that geographers as a group have "confused activity with movement." By "activity," he points to things like the National Geographic Society's Geography Alliance Network, electronic bulletin boards, and workshops, for example. He goes on to suggest that while activities such as these are vitally necessary to the future of geography education, they are not sufficient to move significantly forward. Understanding where geography education is now, where it is going, and how it might proceed, requires systematic data sources, whether quantitative or qualitative in nature. Doubtless, gathering concrete empirical geography education data is often difficult (this accounts for much of this lack of geography education data in general), but it is necessary effort that must be made in order for geography education to move forward in an informed manner.

CONCLUSION

Doubtless, we all would like to see the next NAEP Geography assessment report more than the marginal improvement noted in the 2001 study. It would do us good to know that our students are walking out of the K-16 environment with a fresh excitement for geography and for what it can mean to their lives. I argue that most geographers ventured into the discipline because of a passion and fascination for the way the world functions. We teach it, research it, and, in many ways, simply assume the rest of American society should, necessarily, share our vision. The past few decades of efforts in geography education have illustrated that reaching that goal of fostering a significantly more geographically-literate society is going to be more difficult than expected. Imagine the hours of effort that have gone into the modest improvements in geography ability noted previously. Thousands of dedicated professionals have worked tirelessly in the hopes that geography in America would flourish and that the discipline itself would gain the respect of more traditional
school subjects. Clearly, we have a long way to go. In my estimation, it appears that geography education does not lack those persons who will devote effort and time to the cause. What we, as a group, need to do is to better situate and engage that energy along some commonly-agreed-upon criteria such as those discussed above. We need to dig deep and find the root causes of geographic illiteracy (including but not limited to those elements discussed here). I, along with many other geography educators, would love to see a simple list of tasks and prescription for their undertaking. That list will likely never exist. I am convinced that the best thing geography educators can do is to establish and strengthen lines of communication with other geographers, geography alliances, other educators, and the lay public, to alleviate some of the isolation geography educators often feel, as well as to see that the recent strides in geography education become seeds for long term rejuvenation of the discipline.

REFERENCES


Alice Rechlin Perkins, 70, a leading figure in geographic education who in 1994 became the first woman to hold the title of "Geographer" at the National Geographic Society (NGS) in Washington, died of cancer June 1, 2002 at her home in Fairfax, Virginia. She had a distinguished career as professor at Valparaiso University and later as a cartographer with the NGS.

Alice joined the NGS in 1986 as a respected academic. As the Geographer at the NGS, founded in 1888, she oversaw the completion of maps and directed geographic research. In the late 1980's, as a cartographic supervisor, she oversaw the completion of the Society's sixth-edition world atlas during the turbulence of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany. Many of the 150,000 place names indexed in the atlas changed even as it went to press, leaving Dr. Perkins with long hours of meticulous research.

Dr. Perkins officiated during the society-sponsored geography bees in the 1990s and also helped initiate a National Geographic Society's program for grade schools. She retired from the organization in 1997 but continued until recently as a consultant with the research committee that approves grants for National Geographic expeditions.

Alice Theodora Merten Rechlin Perkins was born in Teaneck, New Jersey. She received a bachelor's degree from Valparaiso University, a master's degree in geography from Northwestern University and a geography doctorate from the University of Michigan. She taught at Valparaiso from the 1950s to 1986 and was chairman of its geography department. Among her research interests was the spatial organization of the Amish.

Alice had served on the boards of Gamma Theta Upsilon, the Association of American Geographers, the American Geographical Society and the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) and was the organization's representative of the U.S. to the National Commission of
the International Geographical Union. She also filled many positions in Gamma Theta Upsilon and was President of this geography honor society. She served on the Executive Board of the NCGE. Alice fostered the development of the NCGE Women in Geographic Education Group (now the SI-NET) which raises funds for scholarships to encourage young women to pursue a career in Geography.

Her first husband, Frederick Rechlin, whom she married in 1955, died in 1993. Survivors include her husband, Donald Perkins, whom she married in 1997; three children from her first marriage, Linda Rechlin of Willoughby, OH, Paul Rechlin of Bismarck ND, and Thomas Rechlin of Ocean Grove, IL. Other immediate relatives include a sister; a brother; a stepson; and five grandchildren.