

President's Report

by Neil Hanlon

It should come as no surprise to learn that this was a challenging year for the CAG. Widespread restrictions on travel and social gathering were necessary and effective responses to COVID-19, but they also led to the cancelation of our 2020 conference in Victoria, British Columbia. A similar fate awaited regional division meetings that had been scheduled for Fall 2020. These were major setbacks for the association, and created yet more disruption in the scholarly activities of our members.

For all this, the year ahead promises a recovery in our ability to share research and teaching accomplishments. Signs of this recovery already abound. The Western Division (WDCAG) held a very successful virtual meeting in March thanks to the efforts of our colleagues at the University of Lethbridge. The Regroupement des géographes du Québec (RGQ) likewise held its 2021 meeting virtually from 26-28 May 2021. And, of course, we are holding our first virtual national conference courtesy of my colleagues at the University of Northern British Columbia. Finally, preparations are well underway to hold virtual meetings this Fall for the Prairie Division (PCAG; to be hosted by Brandon University) and the Ontario Division (CAGONT; to be hosted by the University of Western Ontario). Suffice to say, I think there is much cause for optimism as we continue to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions and begin to look forward to an incremental easing of these restrictions in the months ahead.

Staying connected, building networks:

The events of the past year have highlighted the importance of digital connectivity during troubled times. The CAG continues to make use of a range of e-media. We maintain the CAGlist as a way for members to share news and information of professional interest. We continue to produce 21 issues of *GeogNews* per year that are distributed via the CAGlist. We have a social media presence through our Twitter and Facebook accounts. Finally, we produce the *Annual Directory* and a bi-annual *Newsletter*, our two longest-standing information resources that are now distributed exclusively in digital format. I wish to extend a special note of thanks to Kathryn Laferriere, the CAG Executive Coordinator, for all that she does to ensure that these lines of digital communication are operating.

In addition to these many channels of communication, the CAG maintains formal ties with partner organizations that help us promote geographical scholarship within and beyond Canada. One such affiliation is with the Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences (CFES), which is an important advocate for Earth Sciences research and education in Canada. It is a great benefit to us that geography has a seat on the CFES Council. The role of CAG Representative to CFES was filled for many years by Mary-Louise Byrne (Wilfrid Laurier University), who decided to step away from this position in November 2020. We are now seeking someone else to take on this important task.

On the social sciences side of things, the CAG is one of 80 academic associations affiliated with the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS). Much like our experience with COVID-19, the CFHSS was forced to cancel its 2020 Congress. I attended the virtual Annual Meeting on 18 June 2020, where the CFHSS welcomed Dr. Patrizia Albanese, a professor of Sociology at Ryerson University, as incoming Chair of its Board of Directors. This year, Congress was held virtually (29 May – 4 June), hosted by the University of Alberta.

Finally, with support from the National Research Council of Canada, we remain a member of the International Geographical Union (IGU). The IGU had to postpone the 34th International Geographical Congress, which was scheduled to take place in Istanbul in August 2020. The meeting will instead be held virtually on 16-20 August 2021, and I will attend the Annual General Meeting virtually on 21 August.

Developments from the CAG Office:

The legacy of this pandemic will undoubtedly be expressed in various types of organizational and workplace change. While it may be early days, the CAG is already beginning to consider what we wish to change about our operations based on our COVID-19 experiences. Like so many of us, Kathryn Laferriere, our Executive Coordinator, was forced to transition to home-based work for much of 2020 (and now well into 2021). While this arrangement certainly has its challenges, these have been more than offset by advantages. In light of this, we are extending the home-based work arrangement for the foreseeable future. Obviously, we will continue to monitor this decision as we head into a post-pandemic transition.

In the past twelve months, we made great strides in consolidating all of the association's financial operations. In particular, we are encouraging all regional divisions and specialty groups to move their funds from stand-alone bank accounts to the CAG's savings account, with assurances that the leadership of the divisions and groups will continue to determine how their funds are used. The difference is that the groups will do so by invoicing the CAG to issue cheques or send e-transfers as required. This arrangement will make things much more straightforward for the association in terms of its obligations for financial reporting, while generating savings for the groups as they no longer need to pay banking fees. I am confident this will also make life easier for the leadership of regional divisions and specialty groups, who will no longer be required to set up and manage separate bank accounts, not to mention the bother of moving these accounts or changing permissions every time there is a change in leadership.

Updates about the CAG Executive:

The current and outgoing members of the CAG Executive Committee deserve considerable praise for all their efforts over the past year. I would also like to extend a special note of thanks to our Past President, Sanjay Nepal, whose term will be ending at the upcoming AGM.

At the first meeting of the current executive, which took place not long after the virtual AGM last June, it was agreed that we would check-in with each other via web-conference in Fall and early Spring. As we move forward, we intend to continue this practice to ensure that the executive can tend to unfinished business, receive updates about committee work underway, and deal with any pressing issues that arise.

Due to the challenges of scheduling a virtual conference across five time zones, we decided to hold our two Executive Meetings this year outside of the scheduled conference program. Obviously, COVID-19 restrictions mean that we will hold these meetings virtually. Typically, these meetings are held immediately before and after the AGM. We will be exploring the potential to make this year's scheduling and virtual mode of delivery the "new normal" for all future Executive meetings, even when we are able to return to in-person gatherings.

The Canadian Geographer:

Early in the new year, Joseph Leydon (CAG Secretary-Treasurer), Kathryn Laferriere (CAG Executive Coordinator), Nadine Schuurman (Editor-in-Chief of *The Canadian Geographer*) and I met with representatives of Wiley International to discuss our journal. While the details of the meeting must remain confidential, I can report that all parties came away feeling positive about the state of the journal and the terms of our publishing arrangement.

I am also very pleased to report that Nadine Schuurman has agreed to remain the Editor-in-Chief until the end of 2023. This is great news for our flagship publication, which has benefitted greatly from the excellent work of Nadine and her editorial team since 2011. It also buys us a bit more time (but not too much!) for the CAG to dig out from under the impacts of COVID-19 and turn our attention to finding someone to fill the big shoes that Nadine will leave behind.

Awards:

At the virtual 2020 Annual General Meeting, the following CAG Awards were presented:

- **The Award for Scholarly Distinction in Geography:** Dr. Linda Peake, York University
- **The Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography:** Dr. CindyAnn Rose-Redwood, University of Victoria
- **The Award for Service to the Profession of Geography:** Dr. Dan Shrubsole, University of Western Ontario
- **The President's Award for Outstanding Service to the CAG:** Dr. Alison Gill, Professor Emerita at Simon Fraser University
- **The Julian M. Szeicz Award for Early Career Achievement:** Dr. Gabriel Fauveaud, Université de Montréal
- **The Starkey-Robinson Award for Graduate Research on Canada:** Dr. Jessica Hallenbeck, University of British Columbia

Upcoming Conferences:

CAG

CAG 2021 – virtual, hosted by University of Northern British Columbia, 7-11 June 2021

CAG 2022 – host, location, and mode of delivery to be determined

Regional Divisions

Regroupement des géographes du Québec (RGQ) – virtual, 26-28 May 2021

Ontario Division (CAGONT) – virtual, hosted by the University of Western Ontario, October 2021

Prairie Division (PCAG) – virtual, hosted by Brandon University, September 2021

Membership data:

The most recent membership numbers are presented in Table 1, with corresponding figures dating back to 2011 for comparative purposes.

Table 1: CAG Membership – 2011 to 2020

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018* | 2019* | 2020* |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Regular Members | 377 | 437 | 426 | 381 | 346 | 285 | 253 | 201 | 297 | 227 |
| Student Members | 339 | 378 | 332 | 329 | 390 | 274 | 341 | 239 | 322 | 237 |
| Other | 260 | 280 | 265 | 284 | 293 | 313 | 280 | 137 | 85 | 69 |
| Total | 976 | 1095 | 1023 | 994 | 1029 | 872 | 874 | 577 | 704 | 533 |

*Excludes complimentary members, but includes affiliate members (AAG & RGS-IBG)

At first glance, the more recent figures look unsettling, and they are certainly a cause for concern. We should bear in mind, however, that the recent downturn in membership is largely a reflection of exceptional circumstances. In 2018, we held our meeting in conjunction with the IGU, and the CAG was unable to offer a registration discount to our members. We expected this would result in a dip in the 2018 membership (which it did), and anticipated that it may take two or three years to recover. The figures in 2019 suggested that a recovery was on track, but then COVID-19 struck and we had to cancel our annual conference in 2020. In spite of this, we remain confident that the association will return to pre-2018 levels as we continue to find ways of coping with COVID-19 restrictions on travel. The data in Table 1 clearly underscore the importance of holding the annual conference to our membership. That said, I am fully aware that we need to address what is clearly a long-term decline in membership.

Concluding comments:

It was no ordinary year, but I am very proud of the accomplishments of CAG members who, in spite of adversity, continued to demonstrate the relevance and importance of our discipline in the twenty-first century. I hope you consider your CAG membership and our community to be something that helped you cope over the past year with disruptions in your teaching, research,

and studies. Moving forward, let's work together to renew and revitalize the CAG as an effective means by which geographers from all parts of Canada and beyond, and at all stages of career, may share their research, learn from others, and expand their professional networks.