

**THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**  
**AS A “SUBJECT OF INSTRUCTION”**  
**AND THE ORIGINS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**  
**AT THE MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND, 1946-1963**

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The Memorial University College opened its doors in St John's on September 15, 1925, as a memorial to the Newfoundlanders who fell in the First World War. Although the college calendar had listed Geography as a Grade XI science option for admission since 1933, Geography did not appear among the "Subjects of Instruction" until 1946. The first appointment — in the person of Harold Goodridge — was somewhat fortuitous: Goodridge had been approached by members of the Board of Trustees in June that year to see if he would be interested in filling a vacancy in Art, but he had demurred on the grounds that he did not have "proper academic qualifications for such a post, besides he is qualified in Geography." It had then been argued that he might be engaged as a part-time lecturer in Geography on the grounds that "The subject is not taught well, or given a humanistic approach in our schools, and the College would render a worthwhile service to the teachers of this subject by expanding to include Geography. .... a first class Geographer would be a great asset to College and Country." In the calendar for 1947-1948 H.B. Goodridge, M.A. (Cantab.), F.R.G.S., appeared for the first time in the Faculty List for 1946-1947 as Special Lecturer in Geography; the designation implied his part-time position — a status which he retained until 1951 when he became Lecturer in Geography. His salary jumped from \$1800 to \$2400; he retained a cost-of-living bonus of \$360. The appointment also required him to lecture on art history and appreciation and to curate the College's Carnegie Art Collection. In 1956 Mr Harold Goodridge was promoted to Assistant Professor of Geography, the rank at which he resigned in 1960. He began with six students and finished with about seventy.



Harold Goodridge

When Harold Berwick Goodridge joined the Faculty of the Memorial University College in the fall of 1946 he brought with him a rich experience as a professionally-trained and working geographer. Born in 1901 in St John's to a family of merchant-mariners originally resident at Renew's with continuing roots in Paignton, Devon — part of the Old English community of the Southern Shore north of Cape Race — he had been brought up in England and educated at Bedford, one of the English public schools. He began to study

Forestry (1919-1920) at the University College of North Wales, a constituent college of the University of Wales. When the course was abruptly terminated by the closure of the Forestry School, and rather than transfer his studies to the corresponding Forestry programme at Edinburgh, he elected to resume his studies in 1921 at the University of Cambridge. He took Part One of the Historical Tripos in 1923, comprehending papers in the economic and constitutional history of England, the medieval history of Europe, and Political Science. History as such, however, he found boring, and his interest was already shifting to Geography, an Honours field then but recently introduced, in 1919, at Cambridge.

Under the instruction of the physiographer Philip Lake (1865-1949), the ethnographer and anthropogeographer Alfred Haddon (1855-1940), the historical geographer and surveyor-cartographer Frank Debenham (1883-1965), and particularly his young tutor, J. Alfred Steers (1899-1989) — “a dull lecturer, but a sympathetic supervisor” — he took Part One of the Geographical Tripos in 1924, achieving a B.A. (Hons.) degree, Second Class. Typical of Honours programmes at British universities, then and now, the examinations at Cambridge consisted of eight three-hour papers and a two-hour practical, taken within the span of five days, comprehending physical geography, political and economic geography, cartography, the history of geography, anthropogeography (human geography with a strong emphasis on the geography of race), and regional geography. His training in the discipline, therefore, was strenuous, generalist, and thoroughly systematic.

Armed with a good degree — raised in 1927 to an M.A.— from one of the most prestigious of the English universities — Debenham told him later that he had just missed a First — Goodridge took the Cambridge Certificate of Education in 1925 and launched himself upon a career as a schoolmaster. He taught first at Mount House Preparatory School in Plymouth and later was the Sixth Form History master and Head of Geography at Berkhamsted College, a public school in Hertfordshire, between 1925 and 1934, during which years he maintained his contacts with the School of Geography at Cambridge, of which he was one of the first graduates, and during which he was visited on two or three occasions by his tutor, Alfred Steers. His friendship with Steers, renowned for a lifetime of morphological studies of the British coasts, continued throughout his life; in the late 1940s Steers made a stopover visit to see him in St John’s during a voyage from Halifax to England, and was taken to see the spectacular cliff architecture — “carved like Indian temples” — between Pouch Cove and Flatrock north of St John’s.

In 1934 Goodridge transferred his career as schoolmaster to Indore, capital of the Holkar State in what is now Madhya Pradesh and a strategic road-and-rail junction on the volcanic Deccan Plateau. He remained there, at the Daly College for Princes, till 1944 — for most of the time as Vice-Principal and Acting Principal — taking his princely charges through the English School Certificate and Intermediate examinations. It was at Indore that he befriended Bendre, a “bazaar boy” who later became President of the Indian Art Society, and who encouraged him to draw and paint. Goodridge had already, in his youth, produced a book of drawings of Suffolk and Sussex churches; now he took up pastels as a transition from drawing to water-colouring and began the process of developing his talent in as many media as possible.

India offered him the chance to indulge his passion for travel, both from the fact that his salary was much augmented over that which he had earned or could earn in England, and because the hot season released him from teaching duties for two months each year. As a boy and youth he had visited Southern France a

number of times and had spent summers in Germany and Switzerland, as well as occasional visits to see his family in St John's. From India he was able to travel in China, Japan, East Africa and the Middle East and had "learned an awful lot of Geography"; he also travelled widely within the sub-continent, from Kashmir to Ceylon, in which latter he eventually established a retreat in a landscape of tea plantations. Everywhere he went he observed and absorbed significant details of life and landscape, and everywhere he committed his perceptions to paint. Painting, to some considerable extent, was an extension of his interest in man's relationship to place, and it was his devotion to his developing art that eventually, and indirectly, led him back to his birthplace and an appointment to teach Geography at the Memorial University College and, after 1949, at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Despite advancing years and some infirmity, he was still practicing it in the early 1980s.

Goodridge had used part of his first six-month long leave from India to spend September 1937 with his older brother, Avalon Goodridge, in St John's, visiting the Middle East and England on the way. The outbreak of war in 1939 prevented his leaving India on subsequent leaves. In January 1942, frustrated by his lack of participation in the war effort, he took his two years of overdue leave and volunteered his services as an official war artist and publicity agent to the Admiral of the Royal Indian Navy at New Delhi. Appointed on a temporary basis, he spent the next five or six months sketching and painting a wide variety of warships and shore installations at Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Cochin, Karachi and Colombo, and submarine hunting in the Indian Ocean — "ours was the last ship to get out of Singapore" — eventually producing a portfolio of some seventy major works which now reside in New Delhi.

Early in 1944 Harold Goodridge was invited to join Sir Humphrey Walwyn in St John's as Secretary to the Governor, an invitation that occasioned his first experience of the North American mainland. He crossed the Indian and Pacific Oceans in an American troopship crowded with Italian P.O.Ws, calling at Melbourne and New Zealand on its way to Los Angeles, whence he crossed the continent by train via Texas — "A miserable looking country" — and Chicago to Montreal. From Montreal he flew direct to St John's to take up his duties. He accompanied Gov. Walwyn on tour throughout Newfoundland in the later months of the Second World War, and was able to offer insightful observations on the status of education in the outport schools and company towns. Eighteen months after his taking up his appointment Sir Humphrey Walwyn was replaced by Sir Gordon Macdonald, the last Governor of Newfoundland, who brought with him a nephew to serve as personal secretary, and Harold Goodridge found himself stranded on his native shore.

With the end of the Second World War and the changed world that resulted, with India on its way to independence that came in 1947, the life that he had known there was gone for good, and there was little or no possibility of a return to his former career in an England full of demobilised younger men seeking university degrees and teaching positions. He still thought of himself as a professional geographer; he was also now a recognised professional artist determined to pursue his talent. He spent the winter of 1945-6 with his brother in St John's, taking long walks and climbs, and generally exploring and sketching the countryside — much of it for the first time. During his Government House days he had often accompanied His Excellency the Governor on official school visits and had been shocked professionally by the ignorance of Geography that was evinced by many of the teachers. As a consequence, he wrote in the spring to urge the University College authorities to introduce Geography as a legitimate "Subject of Instruction" and offered to teach two

courses on a part-time basis. He was already well-known on local rostrum and radio as a skilled and informed public lecturer on international affairs and exotic places. The offer was accepted, incidentally providing a solution to his personal dilemma, and he was appointed the first professional geographer on the faculty at Memorial. Indeed, if we anticipate the Confederation of 1949, Harold Goodridge was the first university geographer in English Canadian institutions east of Montreal and the only one east of Laval. McGill appointed its first geographer the previous year, in the person of George Kimble.

The model of Geography as a university discipline which Goodridge brought to Memorial in 1946 was essentially the Cambridge one. Its basic philosophy was as systematic as the new curriculum introduced in 1960. It was modified, however, by Goodridge's experience in the English public schools and in India, and by his recognition that his new students were starting two years behind his English and Indian Sixth Formers. Pragmatically, the working framework of his curriculum, as it developed and as it continued throughout his time on the faculty, was broadly regional; the systematic aspects of the subject were taught within that framework, the first semester devoted to physical geography, the second to the human response. As most of his students were destined for careers in schoolteaching, his approach allowed him to exploit his rich experience and love of travel for their benefit. Many of them recall him primarily for this and were greatly encouraged by it.

Harold Goodridge initiated teaching in the discipline in the fall of 1946 by introducing two courses which first appear in the calendar for 1947-1948:

**Geography I** (Prerequisite: Grade XI Geography)

An outline of World Geography on the basis of the major Natural Regions, with emphasis on the physical and climatic influence on the Social, Economic and Political type of man.

In 1948 the course description was amended to read less awkwardly: "... with emphasis on the physical and climatic influence on the social, economic and political *life* of man." Initially there was no prescribed text, although students were informed that a copy of the *Oxford Advanced Atlas* was essential equipment. In 1948 Pickles' *The World* was introduced as the prescribed text.

**Geography II** (Prerequisite: Grade XI Geography)

A regional survey of Europe, including the British Isles.

The textbook was Blanshard and Crest's *Europe*, and the *Oxford Advanced Atlas* was again declared essential. Both classes met four times per week, each lasting 45 minutes. Neither course was offered in the 1949-50 session: Goodridge was apparently unavailable in this, the first session after Confederation with Canada and after the University College was raised to full university status.

The Calendar for 1949-50, nevertheless, introduced a new version of **Geography I** by adding a second theme to the course description: "The Geographical Control of History". This was the first sign that the discipline might project beyond the traditional regional emphasis; it represents the advent of Historical Geography in the new University's academic offerings, albeit in terms that are philosophically and methodologically unrevealing. Did Harold Goodridge preach E.C. Semple's environmentalism as the course description for Geography I might suggest, or did he introduce his students to the intellectual excitement of Sir Halford Mackinder's geopolitical theories of man's past, present, and global future? His recollection that

Fairgrieve and Young's *Geography and World Power, illustrating the geographic control of history* (1915) was used as the basic text for this part of the course suggests that both the general environmentalist and geopolitical interpretations were present, with rather more emphasis perhaps on the former. Based on his Cambridge experience Goodridge believed that:

If History is the drama, Geography is the stage ... It is an old stage, vastly older than the actors, ... an everchanging stage, and a stage on which one set of actors leaves things lying about to be used as "props" by their successors .... the important phenomena of geography are those which have controlled history by enabling man to use or save energy. It is important, however, to be clear on the meaning of the word "control". It does not mean "make" or "cause"; man is a creature of free choice ..... Nevertheless he is subject to the laws of nature and has a very strong tendency to go downhill along the lines of least resistance. Furthermore, the more man knows the more wisely can he choose, that is, the more surely do the conditions control his actions. ....

Before we attempt to indicate how the course of history can be traced to the influence of geographical controls, we should briefly consider the effect of some very great controls which act silently and constantly on all men at all stages of civilization and which are so familiar that they tend to be overlooked. Firstly there is "place". Every event must happen somewhere, so that the simplest idea of Geography is intimately connected with even the simplest idea of History. The events that happen at a particular place are related to one another and to those happening in neighbouring places, ... so that our first idea is that of environment. Secondly, there is the distribution of energy [By "energy" Goodridge meant all the natural energy found within the environmental system and its multifarious economic, social, political and military applications: -- A.G.M.] Though geographical conditions remain unchanged they may control the course of history differently according as men are able or are not able to use energy.

#### Unpublished essay on "*The Influences of Geography on History*"

This *credo* essay reveals Goodridge as more a possibilist than an environmental determinist; there is even a whiff of Alfred North Whitehead who taught at Cambridge during Goodridge's undergraduate years.

The University Prospectus for 1950-51 offered the revised programme, and promised that "Additional courses may be added during the year". In 1951, in fact, Goodridge's interest in further developing the programme resulted in **Geography I** and **II** being renumbered **Geography 2** and **3** to permit the insertion of a new introductory course, **Geography 1**, which consisted of three parts:

- a. A general introduction to the fundamental principles of Geography and their application to commercial, social, and political problems.
- b. A brief outline of North America.
- c. A regional survey of Canada with emphasis on the historical and economic aspects.

It was probably an oversight that the new course had no prerequisite, while Grade XI continued as prerequisite for what was now **Geography 2**. The prerequisite for **Geography 3** was now either **Geography 1** or **2**, "or a course in History" — unspecified. The textbook adopted to introduce

“fundamental principles” and the first treatment of the geography of Canada was L. Dudley Stamp’s *A Regional Geography, Part I: The Americas*. Goodridge had met Stamp long years before, at a geography masters’ conference at Harrow, and had then (in the 1920s) judged him to be “a bumptious young man”. He had been horrified to find his regional texts in use in Indian schools. So why adopt him in 1951 ? The choice was probably based upon price and familiarity, Stamp’s “Regional” series being well-known in the upper forms of English grammar schools and Scottish senior secondary schools at that time.

In retrospect, it is disappointing to know that Goodridge’s students were not introduced to the geography of Canada through the vastly more rewarding and exciting pages of Griffith Taylor’s *Canada: a study of cool continental environments and their effect on British and French settlement*, first published in 1947 and revised in 1950. Taylor, based at the University of Toronto, had made a survey of Newfoundland settlements in 1945, and he included Newfoundland with the Clay Belt of northwest Quebec and Northern Ontario and the Peace River country of British Columbia and Alberta as “Transition Areas” between his “populous zone” in Southern Canada and the “pioneer lands” stretching from Labrador to the Yukon.

In April 1952 the Board of Regents of the new University released a commissioned *Survey and Report on the Memorial University of Newfoundland*, carried out and written the previous year by Robert Newton, president-emeritus of the University of Alberta. In his general assessment of the Faculty of Arts and Science, which he considered in three divisions: “humanities”, “natural sciences”, and “social sciences”, Newton placed Geography firmly in the last category (p.27). After Philosophy, Psychology — both absent from the curriculum — and Geology, then limited to one course for Engineering students, Geography was given special attention and was recommended for prompt action (pp. 28-30, 48):

Geography is taught to the extent of three courses, and in this respect Memorial University is well off, since comparatively few Canadian universities teach this subject at all, though all feel the need of adding it to their curriculum as soon as possible. Geography no longer consists in memorizing a list of boundaries, coast waters, capes, islands, rivers, products, etc. Modern geography is a study of how the physical nature of the world determines in large measure the nature of the society found in different parts. Though it impinges on various physical sciences, like geology, its natural home is with the social sciences. At Memorial University, history, economics, and political science are joined in one department. Geography might well be associated with this group. But Geography needs a room of its own, properly equipped to serve as laboratory as well as a lecture room. [*Report*, p. 30]

Elsewhere in the *Report*, under recommendations to encourage faculty research, Geography was identified as one of the disciplines in which local field research might appropriately be conducted —

“as they can often be prosecuted with limited resources” (pp.52-54).

In 1951, therefore, in Newton’s opinion and thanks to the work of Harold Goodridge, Geography already stood well at Memorial relative to the level of acceptance of the subject as a university discipline elsewhere in Canada, though that merely underlines the fact noted by Griffith Taylor in the epilogue to *Canada, a Study in Cold Continental Interiors* (p.517), that Canadian universities in mid-century were generally far behind their counterparts in the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa and Australia. Newton’s good opinion of Geography as a university discipline came from his former assistant and successor as President of the University of Alberta, Dr Walter H. Johns. A classicist, Dr Johns had been formerly obliged to teach courses in Canadian history at Waterloo College, in the course of which he became aware of the importance of geography in understanding history and had become a great promoter of the discipline, advocating the appointment of a geographer to the University of Alberta as early as 1943, and again in 1947 when he became assistant to President Newton. [Private communication: W.C. Wonders, 25 April 1983]

Goodridge was an irregular attender at Faculty Meetings, but was present when the Newton Report was circulated in the fall of 1952 (Faculty Minutes, 20 Sept. 1952). In 1983 he was unable to recall the protracted debate that ensued in faculty till June 1953, and does not appear to have used the opportunity to enhance his situation within the University. Specific discussions of Recommendation 24,

That Geography be given better facilities and for administrative purposes be joined to the Department of History, Economics and Political Science, do not appear to have occurred during the debate.

In retrospect, and probably at the time, Goodridge felt that Geography was being treated as a “Cinderella subject”, not held in much academic esteem by some of his colleagues on the Faculty. The same people also tended to discount his paper qualifications as an academic; President A.G. Hatcher (B.A. Hons., and M.A., McGill) in particular indicated pointedly that his Cambridge M.A. had not been earned by examination ! From the outset he had had to “fight to get students”, and it was only at his insistence that Grade XI Geography had been retained as an entrance qualification at Memorial.

In carrying the flag for the discipline singlehandedly, his case was weakened, no doubt, by his predilection to absent himself from campus and the province during the summer recess for purposes of painting and travel in Europe; he spent a lot of time in Switzerland, a country which he loved. Geographical research of the more orthodox kind held no attraction for him. As a consequence he made no contact with the young Canadian academics such as Wonders, Reeds, Wood, Forward and Summers who brought parties of field assistants — undergraduates from the mainland universities — into the new province each summer from 1950 onwards, under the aegis of



the Geographical Branch of the federal Department of Mines and Technical Surveys. Nor did he seek affiliation with the Canadian Association of Geographers which formed in 1951, an omission for which Alfred Steers chided him on the grounds that it would have helped his case within the University.

The place of Geography within the University — the question raised in Robert Newton's Recommendation 24 — eventually came before Senate in December 1955, in the form of a letter from President R. Gushue dated 13 October 1955, recommending for Senate's consideration "the creation of a Department of Political Economy to include Economics, Geography, Political Science, Commerce and Sociology". Action was deferred, and it is clear that it was the place of Geography that constituted the principal difficulty (Senate Minutes, 23 Dec. 1955). Goodridge was not a member of Senate, and the Faculty Council minutes of the period are too attenuated to reveal how he reacted at the time.

At the Senate Meeting of May 1956 three motions were introduced that were intended to resolve the difficulty as then perceived:

1. Moved by Dr Rothney, seconded by Dr Frecker and carried: That the Senate approve the creation of a new department to include Economics, Political Science, Commerce and Sociology;
2. Moved by Dr Rothney, seconded by Prof. Morgan and carried: That the new department be named the Department of Social Studies;
3. Moved by Dr Baird [Geology], seconded by Dr Seary and carried: That a committee be appointed by the Chairman [President Gushue] and made up of other than the departments concerned (i.e. Geology and Social Studies) be appointed to consider the question of Geography and to ask for any representations required, and report back to Senate. [Senate Minutes, 11 May 1956]

The minutes do not reveal whether the new Department of Social Studies had positive reasons for excluding Geography. But it is noteworthy that History had become an autonomous department since the Newton Report, and was represented in the senatorial manoeuvrings by its Head, Dr Gordon Rothney, who was generally well disposed to Geography. Prof. Moses Morgan, the Head of the new Department of Social Studies, held the opinion that it was not so much where Geography should go as where it should not go that was in question, Social Studies having been modelled on Queen's University before Geography existed there. What the minutes do reveal is that Geology, in the person of Dr David Baird, Head of the Department and Director of the Geological Survey of Newfoundland — characterised by Goodridge as "an aggressive type in a friendly way, very boisterous" — wished to absorb Geography. Goodridge, by his own account, fought off the threat to the autonomy of the discipline which, he argued, was "the ideal connecting link between the arts and

sciences” and, like History, a distinct field in its own right. Essentially, he wanted to have Geography retained as an Arts subject. In his battle to defend his position within the University he found an unexpected ally from outside in the person of Dr Trevor Lloyd, then Head of the Department of Geography at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, but shortly to move to McGill to head the department whence Goodridge’s successor was to come.

The nature of Lloyd’s intervention and his hope for Geography at Memorial is indicated in a letter to Goodridge, written from Halifax on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1957:

I do hope that nothing I said while in St John’s will have retarded the progress of geography, whether in school or university. You have done a commendable pioneer job and appear to have broad support for expanding the work of the department. I was cornered by Professor Morgan and the head of the History department, both of whom seemed to have designs on the Geography Department. I tried to emphasise the advantages of maintaining a separate department, and expanding it.

There seems to be no question that more geography is to be taught — in fact everyone appears so sure that the “offerings” will increase that they want to fall heir to the department — to climb on the band-waggon so to speak.

If anything by way of a committee report appears while I am in Europe — and it is not confidential — I would be glad to learn of its general tenor. You can reach me by way of Canada House in London.

By the way, I get the impression here [*Halifax*] that the Department of Education is very keen on the development of Geography, but that they cannot get qualified teachers for the high school grades, and Dalhousie is not very progressive in such things as offering new courses. This underlines my view that you at St John’s may well have a good chance to strengthen your position as THE geography department of the Atlantic Provinces. I cannot see another in sight.

Lloyd’s prophecy was fulfilled, and although the achievement went to his successor, Goodridge’s lonely pioneer work undoubtedly prepared the ground. His vigorous defence of the discipline ensured that the future of Geography as an independent department at Memorial thenceforth went unchallenged and that his successor was welcomed with open arms.

The issue dragged on unresolved, however, through the remainder of Goodridge’s time on the Faculty and after his resignation, Geography in the meantime holding the temporary status of an independent subject constituting a “sub-department” under the direction of the Dean of Arts and Sciences. In February 1960, on the eve of Goodridge’s resignation, the Senate considered the report of an *ad hoc* committee “appointed to consider the position of Geography within the framework of the University”. A motion proposed by Dean Carew (Engineering) and seconded by Dean Hickman

(Education),

That Geography continue as an independent sub-Department for a period of three years, after which time the position of Geography within the structure of the University be reviewed, was carried (Senate Minutes, 19 Feb. 1960), and was ratified by the Faculty Council the following month (Faculty Council Minutes, 8 Mar. 1960).

During the years following the Newton Report Goodridge had continued to develop the curriculum in Geography. In 1953 the weekly lecture schedule assumed its present basic form: three class meetings per week, each lasting 50 minutes in the hour. In 1954 **Geography 1, 2 and 3** were again renumbered as **Geography 100, 200 and 300**, and **Geography 400** was heralded with a Calendar entry, "To be announced". The Calendar for 1955-56, in fact, introduced a rather sweeping revision of the programme and individual course descriptions. The "Geographical Control of History" theme disappeared; regional studies and the regional approach reigned supreme; Newfoundland as a subject for study appeared explicitly for the first time:

**Geography 100** An introductory course presenting the principles of geographical study with illustrations from specific regions including Newfoundland and the three southern continents, as manifesting considerable varieties of the world's natural regions.

**Geography 200** The North American Continent. (Prerequisite: Geography 100)

**Geography 300** Asia. (Prerequisite: Geography 100)

*Note:* Courses 200 and 300 are given in alternative years.

**Geography 400** Europe and the British Isles. Special attention is paid to the influence of historical and cultural factors. (Prerequisite: Geography 100)

The new calendar entry also carried the first departmental regulation, in which a Department of Geography is explicitly recognised for the first time and a major in Geography is indicated:

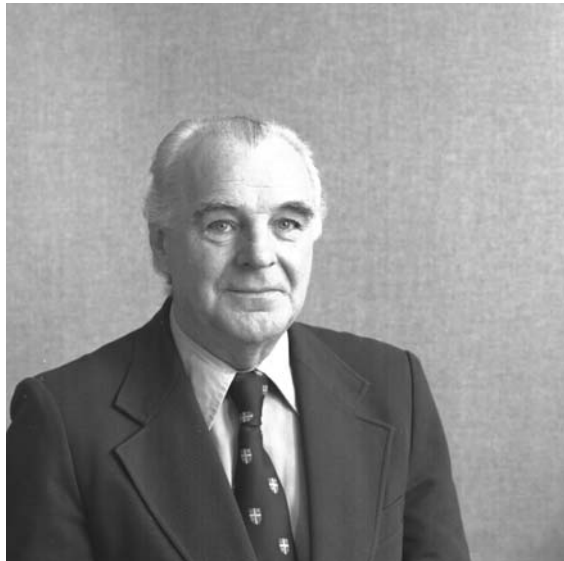
In the fourth year a term paper will be written by students majoring in Geography, on a topic to be approved by the Department.

The arrival of the fourth course, to give the programme the equivalent of eight semesters of study, signalled the change in status. Harold Goodridge's promotion to Assistant Professor in 1956 was another sign that the University recognised that the programme of studies in Geography had matured. In the 1956-57 session the prerequisites were pulled together to form a departmental regulation with a discretionary clause referring for the first time to a Head of Department:

Geography 100 is a prerequisite to all other courses, except by permission of the Head of Department.

Subsequent calendars, up to 1960 when Professor Goodridge resigned, repeat the regulations and course descriptions of 1956 without change. Thus for the last four years of his fourteen years'

teaching at the College and University Goodridge was the officially designated Head of a department consisting solely of himself. His singular case was not unique — it was the situation that William F. Summers inherited in 1960. It was a promise of intent on the part of the University, a promise that Dr Summers subsequently converted into reality as he built up the faculty of the Department in succeeding years.



William Francis Summers

Harold Goodridge's successor, William Francis Summers, was also native to St John's, born there in 1919, but that was virtually all that the two pioneer geographers at Memorial had in common. In almost every other respect the life experiences which they brought to the institution were in marked contrast. Where Goodridge belonged to the old Westcountry merchant class and the Anglican ascendancy of the Southern Shore, Summers' roots were embedded in the Catholic Irish community of St John's, his paternal grandfather one of the numerous small farmers in the immediate hinterland of the port city. In the public arena, while one of Goodridge's uncles had served briefly as Prime Minister of Newfoundland in 1894, Summers' father was Deputy Minister of Justice between 1917 and 1926. Goodridge's mother, who died when he was born, was the immigrant granddaughter of an estate owner of the Protestant Ascendancy in Sligo, while Summers' mother had sixteenth-century roots in Littleham, Devon, and a sea captain, a merchant, artisans and farmers of St John's and a late-eighteenth century planter at Carbonear, English and Irish, among her forebears. Both men lost their fathers in boyhood.

William Summers received his early education at St Bonaventure College in St John's, where he found the academic training generally good and the moral instruction excellent. Nevertheless,

school for him was “a reign of terror”, both inside and outside the classroom. When he graduated in 1938 little effort was made to inform about career possibilities other than the religious. As the tenth child of his parents, however, William Summers had watched several of his older siblings go off to college and professional training, and it seemed natural that he would initially attend the Memorial University College. Evinced no interest in a teaching career, and seeing little value in an Arts degree, he entered a Pre-Engineering programme of studies in September 1938. Thus began that interest in practical and applied aspects of knowledge that became a prevailing tendency throughout his career. For two of his undergraduate years he held the position of assistant in the official Meteorological Station run by and associated with the Department of Physics since 1929, transmitting coded readings to the Canadian Meteorological Service observatory in Toronto and helping to prepare the local weather forecast. The experience was undoubtedly of great practical value when, much later, he encountered Kenneth Hare at McGill.

His undergraduate studies included mechanical drawing, surveying, and map-making, and it was on the basis of this training that he withdrew from the College at Christmas 1940 to work as a cartographer for the Americans at their Fort Pepperell base on the outskirts of St John’s. His main achievement at this time was the construction of a detailed contour map for the layout of an aerodrome between Cape Spear and the Southside Hills south of the city — in full knowledge that the site was climatologically inappropriate !

Unlike the much-travelled Goodridge, Summers’ early horizons had been restricted to the geographical environs and Irish Catholic community of St John’s. Attendance at the Memorial College, with its co-educational and inter-denominational character, had extended his horizons socially, but he was over twenty-one before he managed to get off the Avalon Peninsula. In May 1941 he went by ship to Montreal to join the Royal Canadian Air Force, whence he was sent to Dalhousie University in Halifax to take instructional courses in radar, physics, electricity and magnetism under Douglas Cooper (later Professor of Chemistry at Memorial University), and then overseas to England, Northern Ireland, North Africa and Italy. The circumstances of wartime travel were very different from the contemplative experiences of Harold Goodridge in peacetime; not yet a geographer, or even aware of the discipline, Summers in retrospect expressed regrets at missed opportunities.

Demobilised in August 1945, William Summers spent the next two years completing his studies for a B.Sc. in Geology at Dalhousie and surveying for Claude Howse, Newfoundland’s chief geologist, in the summers. The latter experience included a Coal Survey in St George’s Bay and an Asbestos Survey in the mountain-and-fiord country around Trout River and Bonne Bay, all on the West Coast of Newfoundland. His first-hand knowledge of the island was beginning to expand in a manner that would later prove to be invaluable for his future career.

Considering Dalhousie's resistance to Geography as a legitimate university discipline, it is somewhat ironic to discover that it was there that Summers first encountered the subject — a course in Economic Geography, taught in the Commerce Department by Stanley Cumming and taken as an elective, “just fascinated” him. Cumming alerted him to the existence of McGill's newly instituted Geography Summer School at Stanstead College in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, and in 1948 — on the recommendation of George Kimble — he obtained a Royal Canadian Geographical Society scholarship to attend. There he came under the influence of Kimble, J. Ross Mackay and F. Kenneth Hare, and met visiting scholars from the United States and Britain such as Stefansson, Odell, Wilkinson, Wooldridge and Darby. It was undoubtedly the most stimulating way for anyone to enter the discipline, and Summers was captivated. Kimble, a London-trained generalist with *Geography in the Middle Ages* (1938) behind him and then writing *Canadian Military Geography* (1949), and only three years after inaugurating the Department at McGill, invited him to enter a programme of studies as a candidate for the M.Sc. Thus Summers entered the discipline at the formal point where Goodridge had left off.

During the academic year 1948-49 he took four or five courses at McGill, “really got to know Ken Hare and got a fascination for climatology”, and studied physical geography with Mackay. Both were among the most stimulating teachers in Canada at the time. Consequently, he presented a thesis entitled *The Physical Geography of the Avalon Peninsula* at the end of the summer, and obtained the degree in the fall of 1949. Kimble immediately offered a pre-doctoral fellowship. It was the year that Newfoundland and Bill Summers became Canadian — for him a happy convergence as it turned out, despite the fact that he voted against Confederation !

In 1950 Ken Hare, as George Kimble's successor, invited Summers to join the teaching staff of the Department. Thus began a decade at McGill during which he acquired experience as a professional geographer as teacher and researcher. It was the peculiar nature of the McGill Department that afforded him the opportunity to teach “everything you could possibly be asked to teach”: year-long courses on Cartography, Air Photo Interpretation, Human Geography, Economic Geography, and a course on Conservation which he proposed and developed on his own initiative. Eventually he was solely responsible for laboratory courses in cartography and air photo interpretation, practical challenges that suited his peculiar academic background and natural predilections. It was, as he said, “a great background” for the generalist geographer that he became.

During the 1950s, under Kenneth Hare, the Geography Department at McGill developed a wide range of research projects, some of them of quite fundamental importance. In such an atmosphere it is not surprising that Summers became similarly engaged. The summer of 1950 was the first of a series of field seasons that brought him back to Newfoundland, accompanied eventually by a wife and young family that increased as the decade progressed. That summer, too, he met

William C. Wonders, then a party chief from the Geographical Branch of the federal Department of Mines and Technical Surveys conducting settlement surveys in Central and Western Newfoundland. The Land Use Survey of the Avalon Peninsula and the Urban Classification Survey of St John's in which he participated with Lloyd Reeds and Harold Wood, both of McMaster University, were natural sequels to his work for the Master's degree. In 1953 and 1954 he was in charge of the Government of Newfoundland's Fisheries Settlement Survey, involving thirty-six settlements selected for intensive study and recommendations. This was partly funded by the federal government, Charles Forward and Victor Sim representing the Geographical Branch. These were "tremendous studies", encompassing detailed surveys of land use, economic activities and conditions, population, and much filmwork. In 1953 places on the East Coast such as Bay de Verde, Bonavista, Valleyfield, Fogo, Twillingate and St Anthony were visited by boat; in 1954 Piccadilly on the West Coast and Harbour Breton on the South Coast were added to the survey, which concluded with visits by helicopter along the Southern Shore south of St John's, the ancient Goodridge merchant-family fiefdom. Recommendations were related to the provincial government's centralisation policy which began about that time. In 1955, '56 and '57 he led parties mapping land use and land classification on the Avalon Peninsula, including Forward, Roy Officer, Charlie Raymond and David Erskine. Thus, during the time when Harold Goodridge was developing and defending the subject at Memorial and travelling each summer in Europe, Bill Summers was steadily extending his geographical skills and his knowledge of Newfoundland, and establishing wide contacts with Canadian geographers.

In the mid-1950s Summers was also engaged upon his doctoral research, which, again, was related to his native isle. It was written while he was advisor to the South Coast Commission, for whose Report he wrote the section on the physical geography. His dissertation, entitled *A geographical analysis of population trends in Newfoundland*, further extended his professional grasp of Newfoundland's complex reality and elusive quality. The Ph.D. was awarded in 1957; as in 1948-49 Ken Hare was his supervisor.

At that time McGill was notoriously parsimonious with respect to salaries, especially for junior faculty — Summers' initial salary in 1950 was \$1900 — which explains in part the need to engage in commissioned research each summer. It also explains why he resigned in 1959, in an attempt to establish a private planning consultancy. As a small and inexperienced entrepreneur, he was — as he put it later — "like a lamb to the slaughter", and the bid was unsuccessful. He was on the point of taking a position in the Department of Recreation with the Province of Saskatchewan when he received an invitation to meet Dean Moses Morgan of the Memorial University of Newfoundland at the Mount Royal Hotel in Montreal. It was their first encounter. Harold Goodridge had resigned, and Morgan had been in touch with Trevor Lloyd and Ken Hare at McGill.

Memorial's President, Raymond Gushue, was acquainted with the Summers family in the person of an older brother, a distinguished lawyer who was then head of Canada's division at the United Nations. Morgan, on the other hand, had a preferred policy to only recommend fellow Newfoundlanders for appointment if they had had experience elsewhere. Summers was offered an appointment at the Associate Professor level and a salary of \$6700, shortly to be raised to \$7100, if he would come to Memorial to take over and develop the Department of Geography. It was a challenge — and a salary — that he could not refuse, and it came at the right point in his career. He began in the fall of 1960 with three courses and thirty-five students. As a portent of what he intended to do, he spent the summer prior to taking up the appointment carrying out land use surveys for the Government of Newfoundland under the aegis of the Geographical Branch which sent down Charles Raymond and David Erskine to join him. The initial emphasis was clearly to be the practical value of Geography as it might apply to his native province.

William F. Summers brought to the institution where he had begun his undergraduate studies in 1938 the qualifications and experience of a professional geographer. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that his assumption of the erstwhile singular Headship at Memorial — at the old campus on Parade Street in 1960-61, at the new campus on Elizabeth Avenue in 1961-62 — introduced a radically different programme of studies for students majoring in Geography after 1960. Regional studies disappeared as a basis for the programme, and a strong emphasis on systematic and applied studies became immediately apparent. The calendar entry for 1960-61 read as follows:

## **GEOGRAPHY**

**W.F. SUMMERS**

### **101. An Introduction to Geography**

The idea and principles of modern Geography. An analysis of man's inter-relationship with his environment — physical, cultural and economic. The various elements of the environment: topography, climate, soils, natural resources, population composition and distribution, cultural patterns and industrial regimes, are examined for specific reasons. An examination is made of the influence of these elements on man and his activities, and conversely, of man's role in altering his environment.

### **201. Practical Geography**

An introduction to Cartography, Air Photo Interpretation and Geographic Field Techniques. The course includes the theory and practice of elementary map-making and the interpretation of the physical and cultural landscape from topographic maps and aerial photographs. An introduction is given to the techniques of geographical investigation as a



basis for regional reports, land use programs, resource utilization and national planning policy formation.

### **301. The Conservation of Natural Resources**

This course stresses the modern approach to conservation, namely, efficient utilization of natural resources. Studies are made of the distribution, use and mis-use of forest, soil, mineral and water resources throughout the world. Special emphasis is given to the situation in Newfoundland and on the North American Continent.

Within the calendar descriptions of the new courses can be discerned the seeds of most of the more advanced and specialised courses, and all the major programmes, that materialised as the Department grew and the discipline came to full flower in the following years. The Conservation course and its more advanced sequels were concerned with environmental conservation, policies and programmes, all of which Bill Summers continued to teach with great success throughout his career at Memorial. The foundation course on Conservation was the most popular course taught in the Department, attracting the attention of many hundreds of students otherwise unattached to the Department.

Inspection of the basic course descriptions introduced in 1960-61 discovers no trace of regional or historical geography. These more traditional themes reappeared, however, as advanced options with the addition of new faculty and as courses were reassigned. **Geography 401, North America** was the first regional course to be reinstated, appearing first in the calendar for 1961-62 (although not given that year), followed by **Geography 330, The Geography of Newfoundland** in 1962-63. The latter, predictably, proved to be another highly attractive offering to the student body at large, providing

A study of the physical, human, and economic geography of the Province of Newfoundland with emphasis ... on population distribution, resource use and economic activity.

It clearly reflected Professor Summers' own research interests. Historical Geography was reinstated in 1963 as **Geography 440**, but with an emphasis more consistent with the development of the discipline:

An advanced study of the geography of former times, organized partly on seminar lines. The historical geography of the Middle East, Europe and the overseas areas of European influence are outlined. Particular attention is paid to evolutionary studies of the changing landscapes of Western Europe from prehistoric times to the present day, involving a consideration of the nature of the interaction between man and his

environment at successive periods.

Its reappearance and the various emphases which made up its new guise reflected the interests and experience of Dr Alan F. Williams, a Bristol graduate appointed in 1962 from a lectureship at the University of Glasgow who returned to the United Kingdom in 1965 to take up an appointment at the University of Birmingham. He was the first of a number of faculty who were appointed, but moved on after a brief stay at Memorial.

Bill Summers resigned as Head of the Department in 1971, by which time graduate programmes for the M.A. (1968) and M.Sc. (1970) had become established. A two-year interregnum followed, during which Alan Williams returned to serve as Acting Head (1971-72), followed by Michael Staveley in the same capacity (1972-73). Dr Maurice Scarlett was appointed Head in 1973 and served until 1979, and was succeeded by Michael Staveley (1979-1983), Christopher Sharpe (1983-1987), Robert Rogerson (1987-1988), Chesley Sanger (Acting, 1988-89), John Jacobs (1989-1995), and Karyn Butler (1995-2001 ). Bill Summers retired from active service in 1981. Harold Goodridge, who had retired to live in Nova Scotia between 1960 and 1972, was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws in May 1977 for his unique contribution to Geography at Memorial and for his many accomplishments as an artist; he died in 1989 on the 17<sup>th</sup> April.