

About Professor Lloyd George Reeds

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Lloyd George Reeds (1917-2002)

Dr. Lloyd George Reeds was one of the founding fathers of Canadian geography. He was the first student in Canada (1937) to commence the study of geography and continue on to the Ph.D. Although not the first geographer at McMaster University, he effectively created the Department of Geography there, and steered it successfully through its first dozen years.

Lloyd was born on a farm near Lindsay, Ontario, and agriculture remained his principal academic specialty throughout his career. In 1940 he received his B.A. from Toronto University, and was awarded the Canadian Geographical Society Scholarship. He received his M.A. from Toronto University in 1942 with the thesis 'The Agricultural Geography of the Lindsay-Peterborough Region'. After a brief stint teaching at the Ontario Agricultural College, he joined the Royal Canadian Navy and served for the duration of the war.

Following the war he returned to Toronto University to commence work on his doctorate. It was Professor George Putnam who assigned him the task of analyzing the agriculture of Southern Ontario. Dr. Putnam is reputed to have said: "I have taken care of the geomorphology of Southern Ontario; now you handle the agriculture". In pursuing the research, Lloyd drove along every road in Southern Ontario and interviewed hundreds of farmers. The result was the impressive thesis, 'The Agricultural Geography of Southern Ontario', for which he was awarded a Ph.D. in 1956.

Prior to this in 1948 at the request of J. Wreford Watson, then the geographer at McMaster University, Reeds came to McMaster to teach. Within a year Dr. Watson had left to head the Geographical Branch in Ottawa, and Reeds was left alone not only with geography but also with anthropology. As only an acting chairman (Watson was technically on a leave of absence), Reeds faced the awesome task of establishing a department while scrounging for both space and personnel, and yet continuing his own thesis research. It is important then to realize that the highly respected department that ensued was a product of this one man's vision and efforts. He and his colleagues were required to teach a number and breadth of courses which would strike a current academic with horror. He introduced field work in the surrounding area, both rural and urban, and shared a September field camp with the University of Toronto.

The future of a department is often determined by the quality of its initial permanent appointments. Within his twelve year span as chairman, Lloyd Reeds created a first rate honours program and a Masters' program, and the first course approved in the province for Type-A teaching certification (for high school teachers). By the time he stepped down from the chairmanship in 1961 a solid core of five members had been formed as a basic cadre for the great expansion that was to follow (these were Lloyd himself, Harold Wood, Lou Gentilcore, Derek Ford and Andrew Burghardt). In the 1960s, the department expanded and deepened, and a doctorate program was begun. It is fair to say that within two decades the department was widely recognized as one of the most impressive in North America. In so doing Lloyd greatly assisted the entire university, because, as we know, great universities are created by great departments.

In his own research Lloyd continued his work on agriculture and soils, broadening his focus to encompass the impacts of urbanization and industrialization on the farming economy and community. Thus, he studied the soils of Newfoundland, the Ontario Clay Belts, the land-use conflicts in the Niagara Fruit Belt, and impact of the new Nanticoke works of Stelco on the surrounding agriculture, as well as the broader picture of farmland loss and farmer migration in the Toronto-Centred Region. He served as consultant to the Regions of Niagara and Muskoka, and to the Ontario government. Already in the early 1950s he was teaching on the subjects of the environment and ecology, and discussing earth-warming, of the future of the Mt. Hope airport, and the contentious Red Hill expressway.

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He was an excellent teacher. He felt keenly that all students should know their own country; his Canada course became so huge that he taught it twice a year, and continued this enervating practice until two years after his retirement. He estimated that in his 40 years of university teaching he had lectured to some 20,000 students. He was twice nominated for a 'best teacher' award.

His service to Canadian geography was equally noteworthy. He was one of the founders of the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG) and served as president in 1962-63. He was twice the honorary president of the Ontario Geography Teachers Association, and he even served as president of the New York section of the Association of the American Geographers. He was the member for Canada to the Agricultural Commission of the IGU (International Geographical Union), 1968-72, and the IGU Working Group for Rural Planning, 1975-76. In 1980 he was given the CAG award for service to the Profession of Geography. He retired in 1983.

ANDREW BURGHARDT, McMaster University

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