

Reminiscences: 1965 to 1975 — Ten Years of Decline and Change

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ABSTRACT. This article covers the impressions and conclusions derived from ten years as a director of the Arctic Institute. It touches on some successful activities but chiefly dwells on what went wrong and why contraction and a change of venue and character were forced upon it.

Key words: international cooperation, Arctic Institute of North America, arctic research, research funding

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, le directeur de l'Institut arctique décrit ses impressions et tire des conclusions sur les dix années qu'il a passées à ce poste. Il touche certaines activités qui ont été une réussite, mais s'attarde surtout à ce qui n'a pas marché et aux raisons qui ont obligé à réduire la taille de l'Institut ainsi qu'à le replacer et à modifier ses politiques.

Mots clés: coopération internationale, Institut arctique de l'Amérique du Nord, recherche sur l'Arctique, subventions de recherche

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The experience of conducting the affairs of the Arctic Institute, first as director of the Montreal Office from January 1965 until December 1967 and subsequently as executive director until May 1975, was a challenge, sometimes gratifying, frequently frustrating and disappointing. One got to know many clever and interesting people in circumstances new to a soldier. Most were helpful; some were not.

In spite of a few years working in association with the Defence Research Board, new contacts with university scientists proved to be quite a change. Applied research directed toward defence objectives is clearly different from that of teachers and specialists normally doing basic research in an academic atmosphere. The latter gives rise to a different, sometimes impractical approach to problems of administration and management. Certainly the great majority of academics are dedicated and responsible people but some do add difficulties to the operation of an organization.

Within governments most scientists and their assistants are also dedicated and responsible. Some, however, are imbued with the attitude so frequently found in public servants that governments can do things better, that as the source of financing their opinions must prevail. Some also are infected with another public servant trait to the effect that their job security depends on avoiding decision making in case a decision might reflect badly upon them and that their future advancement also depends on enlarging their sphere of activity and influence. The Institute benefited from assistance by many government officials and suffered from the machinations of a few.

Moreover in government dealings it gradually became clear that the joint Canadian-United States nature of the Institute, so wisely and profitably determined upon when the Institute was founded, now was resented by many in Canada, with resulting deterioration in government help. The writer was taken to lunch once and bluntly informed that unless changes were made support was likely to dry up. There was political opinion involved in this regrettable state of affairs, but the bureaucracy contained many of similar persuasion. It is not clear to what extent this negative attitude existed in the United States.

The preceding three paragraphs, unpalatable as they will be to some, are included because each feature, in varying degree, contributed to the decline and ultimately the demise of the Institute in its original form and as an independent entity.

By and large the staff of the Institute proved to be capable and

with a few exceptions devoted to the Institute's work. John C. Reed, executive director until the end of December 1967, was a tower of strength to both the Montreal and Washington offices and a major factor in the Institute's success during his time in office.

For many years the Canadian National Research Council provided supporting grants, unrestricted in application although based on an annual review of programs and future plans. It also granted funds to assist the journal *Arctic*. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development also provided sustaining grants for many years under similar circumstances, as well as funding for the *Arctic Bibliography*. There were a number of corporations that granted relatively modest but very welcome financial assistance. In the United States funds came principally in the form of government contracts or grants by philanthropic foundations for the conduct of specific projects or activities. There were also a few corporate donors, as in Canada. To obtain this essential support a great deal of preparatory work and briefing was necessary. Frequently "old boy net" approaches were the only means of success, as was the case with the five major Canadian banks that contributed annually for several years, although their direct arctic interests were marginal.

In North America, with the exceptions noted in the next paragraph, until about 1964 only the Arctic Institute, a relatively small number of academics and a smattering of government people in both Canada and the United States were aware of and keenly interested in the Arctic. A handful of universities had northern institutes of their own with the same concerns. The Institute's Board of Governors, composed mostly of senior scientists with long experience in northern research and studies, maintained the Institute's reputation as a leader in arctic science and a source of judgement and advice for aspiring newcomers to the field. The staff had a few members with northern experience but the board was The Institute.

In the United States, the National Science Foundation and the Navy maintained exclusive control of a large Antarctic program. Obviously this produced some cold climate expertise applicable to the Arctic. The Navy also supported a substantial amount of arctic science through its Arctic Research Laboratory at Point Barrow, Alaska. Some cold climate research was also carried out by both Army and Air Force, limited to their specific needs, as was the Defence Research Board in Canada. The

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University of Alaska, ideally situated, well funded and with many excellent specialists in its faculties, grew in stature increasingly as a source of arctic lore and a focal point for funding by the National Science Foundation and other U.S. organizations.

Then during the mid-sixties a significant change occurred in public, industrial and scientific awareness of the Arctic and the North because of a surge of petroleum exploration. In the United States this followed from encouraging results on the Alaskan North Slope, east of the known Naval Petroleum Reserve Number Four, and the eventual major discovery at Prudhoe Bay. In Canada work carried out by the late J.C. Sproule, a fellow of the Institute, initiated large-scale petroleum exploration on the arctic archipelago and the adjacent waters and in the Beaufort Sea. Until these developments, knowledge of cold climate conditions within industry was confined to a few mining, construction and petroleum companies. In Canada, Imperial Oil Limited was noteworthy in this regard as a result of development and operation during and after the Second World War of their Norman Wells field on the Mackenzie River. Alex Hemstock, also a fellow of the Institute, had much to do with this operation and is an outstanding authority. In both Canada and the United States there were a number of government geologists with experience in the Canadian North and in Alaska that was of immediate value to the oil industry.

A surge of new research activity and special training was sponsored by the industry as they encountered cold climate conditions and recognized new requirements. Much that was known to the few was "discovered" again in expensive research programs. Hugh Bostock, of the Canadian Geological Survey and also a fellow, remarked on the waste of time and talent to relearn what he had known in the twenties and was recorded in geological papers and in the Institute's library. Governments also enlarged their support work, such as geology, hydrology and mapping, and in some cases gave direct logistic support.

The Institute worked hard to be a part of this new activity. In fact it did not participate in any meaningful way. Industry sought advice directly from the universities and contracted with individuals and with government agencies for studies of particular problems. Many fellows and members of the Institute participated. The Institute came to be regarded as an unnecessary third party or go-between. In some ways this was unfortunate for those in urgent need of accurate information, since the board, its fellows and membership and its library, as Bostock pointed out, could have answered many questions without the need for further research. As time went on the universities and industry expanded their competence and the Institute was regarded as redundant.

Later in the sixties Canadian government sustaining grants were reduced and ultimately eliminated. Despite this and the dearth of contract research work, the Institute's two field stations — the Icefield Ranges Research Project in the Yukon and the Devon Island Project — were continued. At each logistic support was provided to individuals and small groups to conduct their own projects in these areas of special interest. It is gratifying to know that these are still operating. For some time also it was possible to obtain funding for conferences on northern topics such as the Circumpolar Education Conference, which attracted Scandinavian and Russian participants, as well as American and Canadian. Further, the program of publishing was maintained. Work undertaken comprised the reports of major conferences and meetings conducted by the Institute and

studies by scientists, some of which were sponsored by the Institute, others simply submitted to the Institute as an appropriate medium for arctic papers. Examples are those of George Rogers of the University of Alaska on social and economic conditions in Alaska and Henry Michael's studies and translations of arctic anthropology from Russian sources. Initially in Canada, actual publication was done by the University of Toronto Press, but this was switched to the McGill University Press because of its location in the McGill building that housed the Montreal office.

The *Arctic Bibliography* requires mention. Initially funded by the Canadian government and printed at no cost to the Institute by the United States Government Printing Office, it was very successful, a valuable tool for arctic scientists. After more than 20 annual volumes, Canadian funding came to an end, ostensibly for budgetary reasons, and a change in rules in Washington made it impossible for the Printing Office to continue free printing. This, combined with growing encroachment by the National Science Foundation and the University of Alaska into the field, made the future problematical. An attempt was made to adapt it for computer typography and ultimately convert it to a fully automated system. Costs and the choice of a company inexperienced in this type of work brought the bibliography to an end.

Throughout the run-down period the library remained active; although acquisitions had to be curtailed, its value remained high. There was a steady stream of requisitions for loans and extracts, as well as direct use by Montreal area researchers in the universities and a few companies. Some Ottawa people also made direct use of the collection. It was apparent that the catalogue should be computerized and eventually interconnected with others. Costs ruled out a start.

As time went on, faced with these problems, the Institute's operations ran down. Nevertheless it was clear that, at the least, grants-in-aid for research, the field projects and the information services needed only adequate funding to prosper. Further, it was clear that the headquarters and library in Montreal, away from the focal points of the new northern activity in the West, added a disadvantage for the future. With the chairman of the board, then the late R.G.S. Currie, a search was started for a more favourable location and for renewed and adequate funding on a continuing basis. An attractive offer in Alberta, indicating provincial support and space on the University of Calgary campus, was received, and it was decided to move there subject to full board agreement.

When this conclusion was made known, pressure to negate it was applied. McGill University offered to continue housing the Institute and provide some money. A large company with a growing arctic program, one of the few operating from Montreal, offered funds, and even the Quebec government made some unconvincing show of help. A favourable board decision was made only after one meeting rejected the plan at a Montreal meeting. Present and participating were some fellows, not board members, who were known to be against the motion. This rather irregular procedure resulted in a contrary vote. However, a second meeting in Calgary, where only governors who carried responsibility for the Institute participated, resulted in full approval. The Montreal "dissidents" after this decision even went so far as to have police attempt to prevent the move of the library out of Quebec. This failed, and this short but distasteful period in the life of the Institute was over.

In a period when expansion of its work was anticipated

because of the large increase in arctic activity and the Institute's basic purpose of acquiring knowledge about the Arctic and assisting in its sound development was being advanced dramatically by others, it was sad to see the Institute left out of the action. There was decline rather than growth. However, necessary change was coming. It was apparent that an organization with little or no permanent in-house scientific personnel did not fit the views of those awarding research contracts. Thus the original concept no longer served its purpose. Location in

Calgary in association with the University of Calgary and with funding from the Province of Alberta seemed to be the right step to take. The writer bowed out after ten years with the Institute. A new executive director was appointed to oversee the move and establish the Institute's headquarters in the West. It remains for him to comment upon the nature and extent of further changes. The writer's main regret is that an independent and joint Canadian-United States organization is no longer possible.