

# FOCAL POINTS

## DGA and NCGE in Philadelphia

### NGGE

DGA had two presenters, two awardees, one field trip leader, and twelve attendees

A GIS-GPS workshop by Dawn Willis & Jacqui Wilson

And a talk by Benjamin Franklin

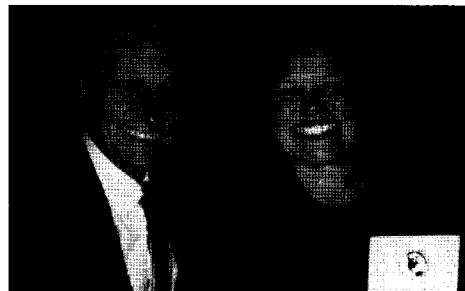
### Alliance Doings at NCGE

By MaryAnna Taylor

The 87th Annual Meeting of the National Council for Geographic Education was held in Philadelphia, October 16-19. The program was extensive, aiming to meet the needs and interests of the participants. Teaching strategies, mapping activities, integrating geography with other subjects, updates on research in geographic learning and, of course, a number of field trips, filled the schedule each day. **Jacqui Wilson** and **Dawn Willis** presented a session, "Ground Truth or Consequence" that used ground truth data to create surface maps using GPS and GIS software.

A special session was held at the Independence Seaport Museum at Penn's Landing where we enjoyed a 'feast of Philly foods' and a tour of the museum. None other than Ben Franklin, applied geographer, capped the evening with a surprised visit and lecture.

In addition to the usual site guide (*next column*), participants received a copy of *Philly Style, The Five Themes of Philadelphia*. This was an introduction to the city through the eye's of Masterman School students.



Peter Rees congratulates Barbara Prillaman on her DTA Award

The awards banquet got off to a lively start with the appearance of a string band that compelled many to get up and do the Mummer's strut. Delaware Alliance high spirits continued when two of our TCs, **Barbara Prillaman**, AI. DuPont MS, Red Clay, and **Barbara Saulsbury**, Wm. Henry MS, Capital, were awarded the NCGE

### DE Figures Big in "Pathways"

For each annual convention, the NCGE publishes a book for its series Pathways in Geography concerned with the geography and history of the host city. This year's volume, Philadelphia: Transforming Tradition in the 21st Century owes nine of its thirteen chapters to Alliance or University of Delaware writers.

First, Alliance Coordinator **Peter Rees** served as the editor and as such wrote the introduction, giving an overview along with an admirable list of 'firsts' the city can claim and an enlightening pronunciation guide to a bit of 'Philly-ese.' Peter also contributed the first three chapters covering the development of the Merchant City, 1680-1800; the Industrial Era, 1800-1945; and Renewal, 1945-2002.

**William J. Cohen**, adjunct professor at the University of Delaware traces the influence of Edmund N. Bacon on the urban design of Philadelphia's Center City. Bacon served as Executive Director of the City Planning Commission from 1949 to 1970.

**Daniel J. Leathers**, Delaware State Climatologist and Chair of the University of Delaware's Department of Geography, contributed a chapter on Philadelphia's "eccentric" weather, including a fascinating map showing five years' of 50-knot winds, 1/2" or larger hailstones and tornado touchdowns or tracks.

**Thomas C. Meierding**, associate professor of Geography at the University of Delaware, wrote a chapter on the sad inheritance Philadelphia's industrial past has left in the form of weathered marble tombstones. Most other vulnerable surfaces have been cleaned or replaced, leaving only the poorest areas to show the history of pollution destruction.

Our own **MaryAnna Taylor** wrote a lesson for grades 5-8 using the concepts of site and situation to introduce the city and to show how such physical systems could promote certain health crises such as the yellow fever epidemic of 1793.

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## About Geography.....

### The bad news

Last Month, the National Geographic Society released the results of a global geographic literacy survey. More than 3000 young adults aged 18-24 from nine countries including the U.S. were asked 56 questions that focused on geographic knowledge and contemporary events. Overall, Americans improved their position from a similar 1988 survey by one place, from last to next-to-last, this time edging out Mexico. Swedish, German and Italian young people ranked highest, answering 70% of the questions correctly, followed by the French (61%), Japanese (55%) and British (50%). Canadian, American and Mexican students answered fewer than half the questions correctly.

Some of the responses of U.S. young adults have been widely reported in the press: 83% could not find Afghanistan on a world map, more knew that the island featured in last season's TV show "Survivor" is in the South Pacific than could find Israel, and just half could locate New York state.

Less publicized results indicated that the number of young U.S. adults who had taken a geography class in school had risen from 30% in 1988 to 55% today, and those who had scored better on that part of the test involving country identification on maps. Young Americans who reported accessing the Web within the previous 30 days scored 67% higher than those who had not been online.

Navigational skills were relatively well-developed. Seven in ten young Americans could identify correctly the western-most city on a hypothetical map - up 12 points from 1988 - and 73% could identify the direction needed to travel between two hypothetical cities.

Generally, U.S. respondents who had completed more school did better as did those who had traveled internationally or could speak a foreign language. Internet use and media exposure also improved performance. Finally, in all countries except France, men did better than women. To take the survey, go to [www.nationalgeographic.com/poll](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/poll)

### .....and the good news

A report, also commissioned by NGS, compared the achievement of eighth-grade students of Geographic Alliance teachers across the nation with a matched sample of students who had taken the 2001 NAEP geography assessment. Students of Alliance teachers had significantly higher scores compared with students in the NAEP sample. Alliance students performed particularly well on understanding U.S. geography, reading maps, and drawing and interpreting maps. When examining student performance against numerous teacher variables such as years of teaching and hours of general professional development, the only variable that significantly impacted student achievement was the frequency with which the teacher had participated in Alliance summer institutes and workshops.

Overall, the study by Kerry Englert and Zoe Barley demonstrated that nationwide the Alliance program was having an important impact on student achievement in geography.

To download a copy of the report (15 pages), go to [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

by Peter Rees

## Treasures on the Bookshelf

We're looking at the closest we could come to books about the use and, we hope, conservation of public lands, starting with **Against the Tide, The Battle for America's Beaches**, by Cornelia Dean, Columbia University Press, 1999.

Dean, the science editor of *New York Times*, has given us a well-written and carefully researched account of America's largely misguided efforts to "protect" the nation's beaches.

Scientists, municipalities, state and national governments, and property owners have consistently and stubbornly refused to accept the basic truth that the oceans will in the end almost surely foil their efforts and will often cause the opposite of what they'd planned. She gives example after example where man's efforts have resulted in the loss of beaches which would have been naturally repaired if left alone.

Dean starts off by detailing the truly herculean project the city of Galveston undertook following the infamous hurricane of 1900 that took 6,000 lives. They built a seawall seventeen feet high, sixteen feet thick at the base, and five feet wide at the top. By August of 1904 the wall was complete. Then owners of the remaining buildings were given a choice: jack them up, tear them down, or watch them be inundated by the fill that was to raise the land surface to eight feet at the bay side and to twenty-two feet on the gulf side. The basic project was completed by 1911, though continued filling lasted until 1929.

Protected by stout rip-rap, the wall was expected to stand up to any hurricane. It did. In August of the 1915 another hurricane made a direct hit; some rip-rap boulders were carried over the wall, but the wall held. And, "only fewer than a dozen" people were killed.

A success story? Well, hardly. . . . "Galveston had made a Faustian bargain, and it would pay the price.

"Beaches and seawalls cannot coexist for long, especially in erosion-prone areas like Galveston. The reason is as simple as it is inexorable: an eroding shoreline is dynamic, but a wall is fixed. The water moves in, the wall stays put. Result: a narrower and narrower beach. Finally, the beach is gone, drowned in a process geologists call 'passive erosion.' Unless it is extended, raised, rebuilt, and reinforced, no wall is a match for the ocean on an eroding beach. Eventually it will be undermined and it will collapse. It may even accelerate its own destruction by inhibiting the natural ways beaches respond to bad weather.

"When a beach is threatened by a storm, it rearranges itself to cope. Harsh storm winds quickly carry lighter sand particles on the surface of the beach to the dunes, where the beach has already established reserves of sand. The heavier particles left behind form a kind of protective

Our second selection this time is a bit heavier reading than Dean: **The Earth Around Us, Maintaining a Livable Planet**, Jill S. Schneiderman, ed., W.H. Freeman & Co., 2000.

Schneiderman has collected thirty-one essays written or co-written by thirty-four scientists, including herself. As she says in her preface, "This book is akin to a chorus of voices. Each part can be encountered alone or in relation to the others. Readers can enjoy the essays in any order they choose because each piece of written work was crafted individually." That is true; however, we found that her order of presentation was a positive addition to the reader's enjoyment. She has grouped these pieces into seven sections: *Records of Time and History, Scientific Judgments and Ethical Considerations, Resources Reconfigured, Local Manipulations, Inventive Solutions, Whole Earth Perturbations, and Global Perspectives*. She begins each section with a short descriptive, unifying introduction of a page or less.

The first section contains four essays on Earth's geologic history. We particularly enjoyed the last, "Henry's Land," by Paul R. Bierman. It is an easy-going account of the history of Henry Moultrip's farm in northwestern Vermont. Bierman and his geology students at the University of Vermont have been studying northern Vermont's history with the good-natured permission and help of Henry and his backhoe. They found and identified two logs deposited on the land during a flood of the Huntington River, which hasn't flowed anywhere near there for the past 8000 years. The logs were preserved by being buried beneath an alluvial fan, a feature which is quite common at the bases of mountains. While in some places alluvial fans are enormous, the few in Vermont are small, and most have been lost in the trees. This gives just a taste of Bierman's topic.

In the second section, we enjoyed "Down to Earth: A Historical Look at Government-Sponsored Geology." It's a somewhat off-putting title for what turn out to be a history of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, U.S. General Land Office Survey, and, principally, the U.S. Geological Survey. This is one of those institutions one has always heard about and that seems almost a natural phenomenon. Actually, it wasn't formally established until 1879, though various ad hoc projects had been government-funded previously.

Section three contains "The Edwards Aquifer: Water for Thirsty Texans," by John M. Sharp, Jr. and Jay L. Banner. They explain the geology which produced the aquifer over one hundred million years. But its recent history is more social and political. Several towns and cities have risen at the foot of the Balcones Escarpment where many springs rise from the aquifer. Controversy has arisen where roads and parking lots, among other constructions,

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