

Reminiscences: The Arctic Institute in the 1960s

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ABSTRACT. The author was the executive director of the Arctic Institute from 1961 until 1968 and his reminiscences deal with some of the financial problems and practices of the Institute during his term. Clearly, during his time in office, the provision of financial support for the organization was a dominant concern of the board and of the director. The increase in arctic interest and involvement in both Canada and the United States a little before and into the 1960s pushed the Institute toward an emphasis on service-type activities.

The author was convinced of the growing importance of the Arctic to Canada and the United States. He was impressed by the stature of the members of the Board of Governors and others with whom he worked, and obviously he enjoyed directing the organization and felt that it contributed to a real and increasing need.

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

RÉSUMÉ. L'auteur a été directeur exécutif de l'Institut arctique de l'Amérique du Nord de 1961 à 1968, et il évoque un certain nombre de problèmes financiers et de pratiques de l'Institut au cours de son mandat. À cette époque, le Conseil et le directeur étaient de toute évidence, surtout préoccupés par la recherche d'un support financier pour cet organisme. Un intérêt accru en ce qui concernait l'Arctique, ainsi que la double implication du Canada et des États-Unis dans cette région, à la fin des années 50 et dans les années 60 ont obligé l'Institut à mettre l'accent sur des activités reliées aux services.

L'auteur était convaincu de l'importance croissante de l'Arctique pour le Canada et les États-Unis. Il était très impressionné par la stature des membres du Conseil des Gouverneurs et celle d'autres personnes avec qui il travaillait, et il était fier de diriger cet organisme dont l'importance se faisait de plus en plus sentir.

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

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Gordon Hodgson's letter of March 1987 to me was impressive — and I assume that he sent a similar letter to other former directors. Somehow he knew just what to say to encourage the participation of an old, long-retired fire horse. He invited "personal recollections and reminiscences." He anticipated a "focus on the life and times when they [the earlier directors] were at the helm." He predicted that "they will want to place the Institute in the total northern circumstances in which it was immersed during their tenure." And he looked to benefit from "their insight at the time as well as their response to that insight and the opportunities (and constraints) of the day." I had to accept an invitation like that.

In his masterful and highly informative article on the origin of the Institute, Raleigh Parkin (Parkin, 1966) described the roots from which the Institute grew, traced the Institute from concept to actuality, explained its essentially binational organization, and summarized a little of its early life. From then (1945) until now, the dedication, the wisdom, and the foresight of the founders have been confirmed again and again.

The objectives as set forth in the Institute's articles of incorporation have been followed faithfully. The Institute has acted, as predicted by a former Prime Minister of Canada, Lester Pearson, in 1946, "both as a spur and a guide to the two governments" (Parkin, 1966:18).

I became the director of the Institute in 1961: it was 15 years old, I was 55. I had satisfied the two major requirements of that time for full retirement from the United States Civil Service System — 30 years of service and the attainment of 55 years of age — within a very short time of each other. I was ready for a change in the interest of good career planning and management, hopefully in the broadening of interests and responsibilities, and because I was a bit uncomfortable with some aspects of the management and operation of the Geological Survey, that outstanding and venerable federal agency to which I still am dedicated and for which I still have a great admiration and respect.

And so I accepted the position of executive director of the Arctic Institute when it was offered, and my family and I moved to Montreal. It was a good arrangement — the position was challenging and rewarding. We liked Montreal. We liked Canada and the Canadians, both French-speaking and English-speaking. There was a lot going on in the Arctic, and we soon felt ourselves to be a real part of it.

Here are a few comments on directing the Institute during my term. They center around funding and people. I would wager that it is not very different today.

FUNDING

Raleigh Parkin, in his article already quoted (Parkin, 1966:17), included a few fascinating paragraphs about the erratic funding of the Institute in its first four or five years. They are worth reading again. My paper in the same issue of *Arctic* summarizes the Institute's financial record up through the 1960s (Reed, 1966:19):

In 1945, the first year of actual operation, the Institute carried on its business on an income of about \$10,000. By 1950 the level of activity had risen to approximately \$156,000 and, in the next five years, to around \$400,000 a year. Since 1958 the yearly revenues have fluctuated between about \$1,000,000 and \$1,500,000. The total revenues for 1965 were \$1,167,000. This gives a fair idea of the level of activity through the years.

That article also noted that during my tour most of the funding was from government sources, through many grants and contracts, mostly for specific purposes. Significant support continued from foundations, industry and individuals. Also special acknowledgement in the fund-raising area was made to Walter A. Wood for his own contributions and for his active and energetic help to the director and the staff in fund-raising efforts.

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THE 1960s

During the interval in which I was director of the Institute the problems of obtaining adequate, or even inadequate, funding of the organization were of paramount, at times overwhelming, importance. To operate at all, to even attempt to do its job as understood by the organization, an imposing amount of money was needed.

To some degree the founders seem to have anticipated this. They placed the responsibility for providing funding squarely on the Board of Governors. We are reminded of this by Raleigh Parkin, who quoted from a Proposal for an Arctic Institute of North America: "The provision of adequate finances should be recognized as a direct and continuing responsibility of the Board" (Parkin, 1966:13).

The idea was great, but during my time it was only partially effective. The members of the board were busy men in responsible positions, and there were many claims on their time. They could give only limited attention to Institute affairs. Further, a goodly number held positions that made it embarrassing or impossible for them to attempt to raise funds for an organization other than the one that held their primary responsibility. A few board members took the fund-raising responsibility very seriously, and they were active, generous and effective in their efforts. But the main load fell on the executive director. He had to plan, organize and carry out the fund raising, of course with the help and participation of such governors as were able and inclined to become involved.

In my opinion, during my watch, too much of the director's time had to go to handling fund raising and related problems.

One incident is clearly remembered. A board meeting had been held near the end of a week. At that meeting was discussed the possibility of obtaining some financial support from a certain foundation. Early the following week I called on the head of that foundation, along with a governor who had volunteered to go along and lend support. We were asked to wait in the reception room because the foundation head had a visitor. Within a few minutes the door to the inner room opened and there emerged another governor, the president of a university, who had attended the board meeting the previous week. I will admit to a degree of discouragement with this kind of competition for funds.

COMPETITION FOR FUNDS

Early in the Institute's history, and continuing into my interval, various sources of funds — government, both Canadian and American, and private, such as foundations, individuals, and companies — could be approached without much direct competition. Of course there were always some special difficulties to be faced, such as the high cost of arctic research compared to the cost in more equable regions. Remember that it was the general lack of interest in the Arctic that helped prompt the organization of the Institute in the first place.

As time went on and interest in the Arctic grew, more and more individuals and organizations, such as government groups, universities, and commercial interests, became involved, and there were more and more claims on the sources of support. Of course a major reason for the organization of the Institute was to promote just such interest. In a way it was the success of the Institute's stimulation of arctic interest and involvement that made it harder and harder to raise funds to support the organization.

Further, a good case could be made, and was made repeatedly, that a university could operate many, perhaps most, research projects more effectively and efficiently than could the Institute itself. A common subject of discussion among those with arctic interests was that the Institute was driving itself out of business. I think there was something to that idea. But there was another facet.

There were certain northern projects that could be better carried out by an organization in which a wide range of arctic interests could be brought together, discussed, focused, and progress made. The Institute had that type of structure. Such projects were for the most part service-type activities — a publications program, an information service, a comprehensive arctic bibliography, and advisory functions. Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 illustrate some such activities. Figure 1 is a picture taken at a general seminar on the Arctic called by the Institute. Figure 2 shows a meeting of the Institute's Arctic Research Laboratory Advisory Board. Figure 3 pictures a meeting of the Institute's Board of Governors where arctic problems were regularly discussed. Figure 4 was taken at a shirt-sleeves meeting called by the Institute to review current arctic and Institute affairs.

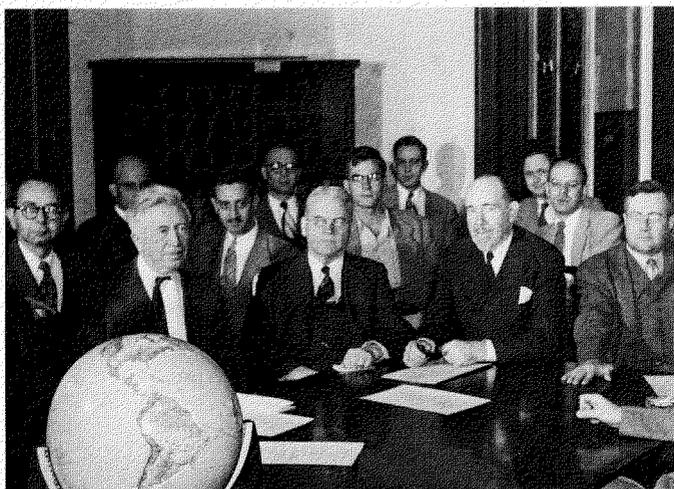


FIG. 1. Attending a seminar on the Arctic held at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, on 10 November 1949 under the auspices of the Arctic Institute are, left to right, front row: M.C. Shelesnyak, Director of the Baltimore Office of the Arctic Institute; V. Stefansson, arctic explorer and a founder of the Arctic Institute; Isaiah Bowman, geographer and President of the Johns Hopkins University; Sir Hubert Wilkins, arctic explorer; and John Field, physiologist, Office of Naval Research.

During my term as executive director such projects grew proportionately in the Institute's total package of activities, with some loss to the universities of support for field research projects. The background for such service-type activities was solid and well established, due largely to the foresight and early efforts of A.L. Washburn, the Institute's first full-time director. He it was who presided over the start of the Institute's journal *Arctic* in 1947, a publication that still continues. He initiated in the same year the launching of the *Arctic Bibliography* under the editorship of Marie Tremaine. That bibliography is generally recognized as one of the outstanding regional bibliographies. And he started the Arctic Institute Library, which became one of the few great polar libraries of the world. A key step in the beginning of the library was the donation to it of the personal library of Philip Sidney Smith, then Chief Alaskan Geologist of the United States Geological Survey.

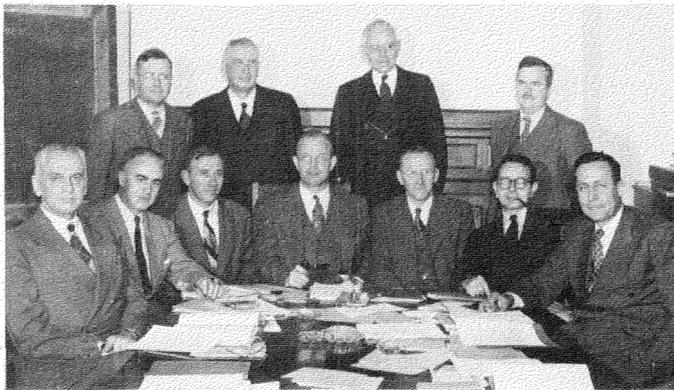


FIG. 2. In session at the Johns Hopkins University in 1950 is the Advisory Board of the Arctic Research Laboratory. The board was operated by the Arctic Institute under contract with the Office of Naval Research. Present are, left to right, back row: John Field, physiologist, Office of Naval Research; Remington Kellogg, Director, U.S. National Museum; Alexander Wetmore, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; and Ellis Johnson, Director, Applied Physics Laboratory, The Johns Hopkins University; front row: Commodore W.G. Greenman, U.S. Navy, Director of Naval Petroleum and Oil Shale Reserves; Thomas Killian, Chief Scientist, Office of Naval Research; Frank Schairer, Geophysical Laboratory of the Carnegie Institution; John C. Reed, geologist, U.S. Geological Survey; George MacGinitie, biologist, Director of the Arctic Research Laboratory; M.C. Shelesnyak, Director of the Baltimore Office of the Arctic Institute; and Roger Revelle, Director, Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

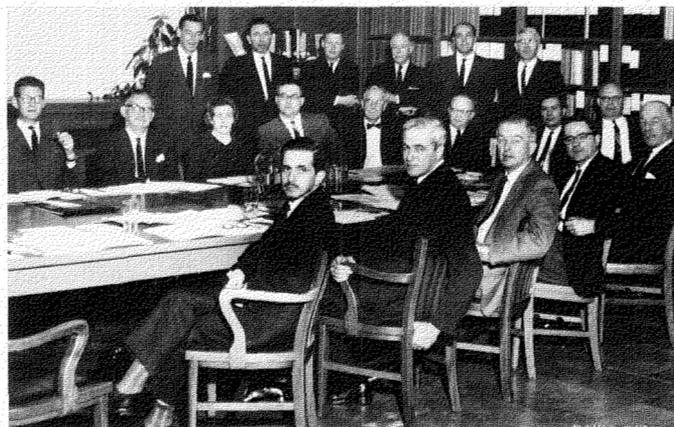


FIG. 3. Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Arctic Institute in the Library of the Institute in Montreal, probably about 1964. Standing, left to right, are Fred Roots, Government of Canada; William Benninghoff, University of Michigan; D.C. Nutt, Dartmouth College; Henry C. Collins, U.S. National Museum; George Jacobsen, arctic engineer and contractor; and C. Earl Albrecht, former Commissioner of Health, Alaska. Seated behind table are Richard Nolte, Institute of Current World Affairs; W.E. Van Steenburgh, Government of Canada; Diana Rowley, Editor of *Arctic*; Norman Wilimovsky, University of British Columbia; Laurence Irving, University of Alaska; Hugh Raup, Harvard University; J. Ross Mackay, University of British Columbia; and John C. Reed, Arctic Institute. Seated in front of table are Louis E. Hamelin, Laval University; Walter Sullivan, *New York Times*; Richard Goldthwait, Ohio State University; M.J. Dunbar, McGill University; and Walter A. Wood, American Geographical Society.

During the 1950s and the 1960s other service activities grew vigorously. These included expanded informational efforts, the holding of symposia on a range of arctic topics supported by various sources, mostly governmental, and inspection trips to various arctic localities in Canada, Greenland, and Alaska. A number of others could be mentioned.

But research itself was also financed, in addition to support activities. In the '60s the Institute was able to support in whole



FIG. 4. Attending a conference in the fall of 1961 to discuss Arctic Institute affairs at the Chanticleer Hotel in St. Adele, Quebec, are, left to right, standing: W.E. Van Steenburgh, Deputy Minister of Mines Technical Surveys; Max J. Dunbar, oceanographer, McGill University; Fred Armstrong, U.S. Steel Foundation; Gordon Robertson, Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs; Omand Solandt, Chairman, Science Council of Canada; Joseph L. Fisher, President, Resources for the Future; and Raleigh Parkin, a founder of the Institute. Left to right, kneeling, are Trevor Lloyd, geographer, McGill University; John C. Reed, Arctic Institute; T.O. Jones, Head, Polar Programs, National Science Foundation; Terris Moore, former President, University of Alaska; and D.C. Nutt, Dartmouth College.

or in part a number of generally small research projects through a grants-in-aid program. Also it carried out for a number of years a larger in-house program on Devon Island in the Canadian Arctic concerned largely with the effects of an island ice cap on the neighboring land and sea environments.

Another in-house project was the Icefield Ranges Research Project, or IRRP, in southwestern Yukon Territory. This was largely a joint undertaking of the American Geographical Society and the Arctic Institute. The key figure in this long-range undertaking was Walter A. Wood. He provided leadership, inspiration, participation, and money to the project for many years. Fiscal support and participation also came from many others — governments, institutions, and individuals. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate a little of the IRRP project.

THE BUGABOO OF OVERHEAD

One aspect of the Institute's financial practices that required a disproportionate amount of time, caused a disproportionate amount of difficulty, and, yes, led to a certain amount of criticism and even friction to the detriment of operations was the matter of overhead. It was a common practice, while I was in the saddle, for non-profit research organizations, including many universities, to finance the organization by assessing project funds, from whatever source, a calculated percentage to pay for general operating costs — salaries of office personnel, light, heat, administrative travel, and the like — and for certain service functions, such as library operation.

The idea is simple, equitable if properly practiced, easily understood, and generally acceptable. But the practice also is full of pitfalls that can trap an administrator when he is not looking. Some universities and some other research organizations have funds available for such general costs. There may be endowments, bequests, and earnings of various kinds that in certain circumstances can be so used, and are.

The Institute, of necessity, used the overhead pattern. I use the



FIG. 5. In the fall of 1965 the director of the Institute's Montreal Office (later the executive director), Brigadier H.W. Love, travelled with the executive director and a governor, Richard Nolte, to inspect various research facilities and other places in the Yukon and Alaska. In Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, we were briefed on local problems and activities by David Judd, Commissioner of the Yukon. Nolte is in the foreground, the commissioner is on the right behind and Brigadier Love on the left.



FIG. 6. At the Icefield Ranges Research Project (IRRP) near Kluane Lake and west of Whitehorse, not far from the Alaska border, Richard Ragle, of the IRRP, describes some experiments going on in a snow pit high on the Kaskawulsh Glacier at Divide Camp to Richard Nolte, left, and Brigadier Love, center.

words "of necessity" because there was no other way to keep operating. In the Institute resources available for general expenses were limited indeed. They included for the most part a few small, unrestricted contributions, membership dues, and sales of publications. In such matters the Institute constantly had the valuable and freely contributed advice and guidance of Chester Owens, Dean of the School of Business Administration of Columbia University. He was a firm anchor in what was at times a turbulent sea.

The overhead pattern soon became acceptable to most sources of funds — governments, foundations, businesses, and individuals — but not to all, and not to all governors of the Institute. There were a few tough periods. I remember recalling to mind in a number of instances the old adage that "If the man does not

agree with me, I obviously have not explained the matter properly to him."

Most funders nevertheless soon learned to insist on an explanation from the Institute as to how the overhead percentage was calculated and what items were included — and they were right. They should know.

Some projects, like the *Arctic Bibliography*, for example, required much less general support than others, such as a complicated field project, because most of the general support was paid by the project itself. Exceptions to or modification of the overhead assessed to any project could be and were made as seemed appropriate.

If an organization is not properly balanced between its projects and its overhead activities, the overhead can easily get out of hand and become an unacceptably large or small percentage. If it gets too large, the organization is trying to support too many projects or too large projects with too little staff and service capability. Or it is attempting to include items under overhead that should not be included. Theoretically, I suppose, the calculated overhead percentage could become 100 — a figure that funders would not tolerate. If too small, it would seem unnecessary to apply the overhead principle at all.

RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE

Some people, I am told, enjoy dealing with the kind of administrative activity just discussed. I do not. On the other hand, the Institute had another facet of administration that was most enjoyable and rewarding. That side, and the pleasure of seeing things happen, made it all worthwhile to me. That side was the people one met and with whom one worked.

First, the staff, both in Montreal and in Washington, comprised people who were great. They were competent, devoted, loyal, hardworking, self-effacing, and generally underpaid.

Second, the individuals who made up the Board of Governors were carefully selected, mostly outstanding men from govern-



FIG. 7. In 1961 the Arctic Institute managed for the Office of Naval Research a review on the ground of arctic research in North America. The review group travelled from Washington in a Navy R5D to Ottawa, then to Churchill, then Greenland, across arctic Canada making several stops, and on to Barrow and other points in Alaska. At Camp Tuto, Greenland, at the edge of the ice cap a few miles east of Thule, the group encountered a very long and severe blizzard.

ment, business, and academia. Many were men of stature and of impeccable reputation. It was a privilege to work with nearly every one of them. My life has been much richer for knowing them and associating with them, albeit a long time ago.

For the most part the same was true of those constituting the advisory boards, committees and inspection and other groups with which the Institute worked. The Arctic attracts that sort of individual.

The kind of people that I have been describing is evident, I think, from a number of the illustrations included in this reminiscent article. Figures 7 and 8 illustrate one incident in



FIG. 8. Soon, on the way to visit an experimental tunnel deep in the ice, the group was forced to abandon its bus and struggle afoot a few hundred yards into the long ice tunnel, where the party was marooned for three days, until the storm abated.

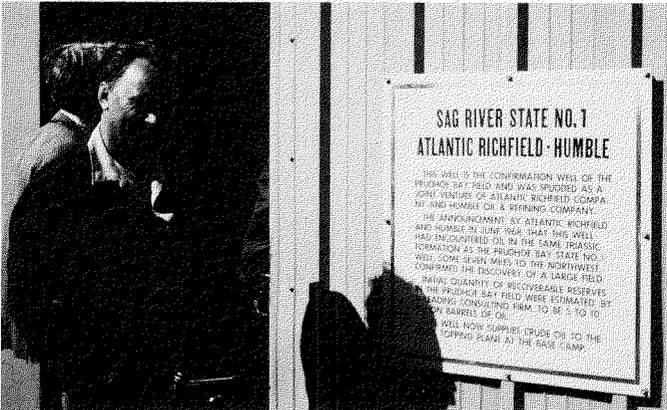


FIG. 9. Dr. Treshnikov, the Director of the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute of the U.S.S.R., at the confirmation well, Sag River No. 1 of Atlantic Richfield, in the Prudhoe Bay area, Alaska, July 1970. Behind the director in the doorway is Colonel Graham Rowley, a leading Canadian arctic specialist.

1961 that may be indicative. The Institute was guiding a group reviewing arctic research across North America from Greenland, through Canada, to Alaska under contract with the U.S. Office of Naval Research. Between Camp Tuto, Greenland, and an experimental tunnel in the ice cap a violent blizzard stopped our bus when it was within about a quarter of a mile of the tunnel portal. The party was made up of high-ranking military officers, researchers and administrators from a number of universities, the chief science writer of *The New York Times*, skilled and



FIG. 10. A rocket launcher at Point Barrow is shown to Richard Nolte by Director Brewer of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory, 1965.

experienced arctic specialists, and officials from both the Canadian and American governments. The young lieutenant driving the bus said, "We must abandon the bus and walk to the shelter of the tunnel. I hope you all have strong legs and healthy hearts and lungs, for it will be hard going. Do not let yourself be blown off the road or you will be in real trouble. Good luck." Almost to a man, the group replied, in effect, "If you say so, Lieutenant, you are responsible. Let's go." It was impressive.

We all made it, and we were in the tunnel for three days. Incidentally, I had little difficulty. I was more than 25 years younger then, although I did have to stop and rest, and catch my breath, by squatting beside a pole marking the edge of the ramp and wrapping both legs and arms around the pole.

IN SUMMARY

My experience as executive director of the Arctic Institute was rewarding, it was interesting, it was enjoyable. In retrospect it came out definitely on the plus side. Many things of importance in and to the Arctic Institute of North America went on while I was in office, or occurred shortly before or after that interval. It was a privilege to have the feeling of being a part of some of those events. Off the cuff come to mind such items as Alaska statehood, extensive oil and gas exploration in arctic Canada, the annual Alaska science conferences, the cruise of HMCS *Labrador* through the Northwest Passage, the discovery of the Prudhoe Bay oil field (see Fig. 9), the passage under the arctic ice of the submarine USS *Nautilus*, the programs of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory (see Fig. 10), studies by both the Canadian and American governments on the arctic ice, the work of the Canadian Defence Research Laboratory near Churchill, and the Canadian research programs at Resolute. One could go on and on.

I am grateful to have had the privilege of being the director of the Institute during such a stimulating time. I would like to do it again, if I were 40 years younger.

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