

Chapter 7

James R. Anderson Lecture: “Why Things Are Where They Are”

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ABSTRACT

Have you ever wondered why things are where they are? Most people probably don't think about this question much. Through life's experiences we learned that certain things can be expected to be where they are relative to other things. Schools are near residential neighborhoods. Doctor's offices are near hospitals. Unless something calls attention to it, you probably don't think about why something is where it is; you just know that's the case. This paper about how a geographer, practicing his craft, was able to solve real world problems. The street opinion is that geography is about place names; knowing where all the countries are; that's not the "geography" I know and not what I want to be known for doing. I am an applied geographer who likes to solve problems, which if solved, make a difference in society. This is a story about how my life was intertwined with Jim Anderson's life and experiences as an applied geographer as well as numerous other applied geographers, spanning the last 50 to 60 years.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Most people probably don't think about why things are where they are, but geographers do. Through observation, geographers learn that certain things can be expected to be where they are relative to something else. Schools are near residential neighborhoods. Doctor's offices are often near hospitals. The reasons are obvious to most people but not something they dwell on until they have to make a decision like buying a house or choosing a doctor.

If you grew up on a farm 60 or 70 years ago, you could pretty much bet on the outhouse or privy (or whatever the preferred local name)¹ would be located at least down slope, and hopefully, mostly downwind of the main house. My brother-in-law, who grew up over 80 years ago on a farm in South Georgia, said they only wanted it where you could get to it fast in the winter. Farmers today, of course, can be expected to have indoor plumbing and running water and all the conveniences of an urban dweller so location decisions deal more with where to put the barn or utility shed.

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But even the expectation that the privy location should be downwind may not always be correct. I was born and raised in a house located on the fringe of the city. I am not certain but I think I remember my mother once told me our house had an outhouse in the back corner of the lot when they bought the place in the 1930s. I don't remember it because by the time I was born it was gone and we had an indoor toilet that had been tacked onto a house built in the 1890s. Also, since I wasn't born yet, I don't know if the outhouse was located because of prevailing winds or for some other reason. The prevailing winds in Athens, Georgia are mostly from the west (about 45 percent of the time) which meant the neighbors on the east side of the property got the worst end of the deal. Given the location I was told was the site, I suspect the little brown shack was probably located to be the least visible to the neighbors.

HOW A MATHEMATICIAN BECAME A GEOGRAPHER

This paper is not about outhouses; it's about how a geographer does (or did) geography; how one geographer practicing his chosen discipline, was able to go about solving some real world problems doing geography. Geographers are those strange people who are curious about why and where things are located. Despite the average person on the street's opinion that geography is about place names and knowing where all the countries are; that is not "geography," and it is not what I want to be known for doing. Furthermore, I am an applied geographer. I like to solve "real world" problems; problems, which if solved, will make a difference.

Also, this is not a professional paper as much as a story; a story with a "thread" that ties my history as an applied geographer with the applied geography legacy that James R. Anderson left us as well as connections to other geographers and non-geographers influenced or was influenced by Jim (People with a connection to Jim Anderson or to me are identified in **bold** letters. Most were applied geographers.) This is also a story about how I became a geographer and about lessons I learned from applied geography projects I have worked on over the last 45 years. Before launching into history, however, I want to tell a little about Jim Anderson and how I came to know him. Unlike other professors, I could comfortably call him Jim when appropriate. This was not the case with my first geography professor at the University of Georgia, **Dr. Merle C. Prunty**. I learned painfully that it was always "Dr. Prunty" even though I was a "Doctor" too when I once called him "Merle" in a social situation. To explain my relationship with Jim Anderson I need to explain my relationship with Dr. Prunty.

First, it is necessary to provide a little personal background. I was lucky to be born in Athens, Georgia, literally next door to the University of Georgia. I was the son of an automotive radiator repair man and practically raised in an automotive garage. My father quit school in the 8th grade to become a "railroad engineer" but never made it because he suffered loss of part of his left leg hopping a speeding freight train as a brakeman. He was a remarkable strong man capable of lifting radiators, many weighing over a couple hundred pounds. I think he expected I would follow in his path.

He was dismayed why I even bothered with college but it was an absolute passion of my mother that all of her children were going to get a college degree. Because of my upbringing in a garage, I thought I might like to be an engineer, specifically a mechanical engineer. My plan was to enter a five-year program with three years at the University of Georgia in mathematics and two years at Georgia Tech in engineering. Unfortunately, time disrupted my plans. When I was born my father was 51 years old. Just as I entered college, my Dad turned 70 years old, still struggling to handle a backbreaking job. He had to

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