



Beginnings: Battling bureaucrats, interstate cooperation and a Sydney Harbour cruise

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Lindsay Francis' presidential report, 1977, told the story of the precise beginnings of AGTA.

In 1966 a small group of geographers and geography teachers, attending an ANZAAS [Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science] Conference in Melbourne, discussed the possibility of forming some sort of national body to focus on geographical education. A number of states had active geography teacher associations and it was felt that a national forum was needed within which those interested in geographical education could exchange ideas and provide support for each other. Planning meetings during the latter part of the year and early in 1967 led to the formation of the Australian Geography Teachers Association (Francis, 1978, p. 127).

Don Biddle, foundation president of AGTA, traces the genesis of AGTA a little further back to the turbulent educational environment of the early 1960s when social studies was the preferred mode of delivery for the teaching of social sciences in secondary schools (Biddle, 1992, p. 37). Biddle explained that, 'A generalist approach to the biophysical sciences and social sciences was recommended in place of teaching the discipline' (Biddle, 2006, p. 13), an approach that was similar to that practised in primary schools, rather than delivery through the separate disciplines of History, Geography and Economics (Biddle, 1992, p. 37). Biddle added that, "... secondary school programs were decided by bureaucratic committees and representation on syllabus committees was limited to certain categories of expertise with little or no input from teachers" (1992, p. 38).

State-based geography teachers associations, history teachers associations, academic geographers and geographical societies agitated for change.

These concerns of geography teachers were brought to the attention of the organisers of the Geography Section at the 36th ANZAAS Congress held in Sydney from 20 to 24 August 1962. The organisers responded by including a

session on *The Teaching of Geography in the Secondary School* and by inviting the presidents of the Geography teachers' associations in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria to present papers on the position of geographical education in their state (Biddle, 1992, p. 38).

Teachers and teacher educators began to discuss the possibilities of closer liaison and cooperation in an endeavour to form a national geography teachers' association. In 1966, an interstate planning committee was established with intentions to provide links between the geography teachers' associations in the various states and possibly with teachers in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. The committee was to prepare the inaugural meeting of the national geography teachers' association in Melbourne. This inaugural meeting took place on Saturday, 10 June 1967 in the Redmond Barry Building at the University of Melbourne (1992, p. 39).

The first AGTA conference, organised by Geoff Conolly, was held over three days, 30, 31 August, 1 September 1968, in a single lecture room at Sydney Teachers' College. One hundred and ten participants, with the majority of interstate delegates billeted in houses of Sydney teachers (Francis, 1978, 129), listened to a variety of papers, watched films, riffled through books on display, undertook field studies on the port of Sydney and, of course, enjoyed a harbour cruise. The inaugural edition of *Geographical Education* contained most of the papers presented at this conference (Biddle, 1992, p. 42).

Geographical Education, volume 1, number 1, June 1969 contained:

The changing nature of geography in the secondary school by D. S. Biddle

Frontiers in human geography by T. W. Beed

Materials in geography by K. J. Collins

Pupil inquiry in geography lessons by B. Cox

The way ahead by G. H. Dury

Landscapes, terrain imagery and the geographical imagination by A. S. Fraser

Frontiers in regional geography by R. S. Mathieson