

The Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers

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In 1963, the Association of American Geographers (AAG) inaugurated a *Committee on Latin American Geography* to encourage interaction among these regional specialists. To further this effort, a group of geographers attending the IX General Assembly of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History met on June 5, 1969, at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. at the invitation of Preston E. James. After considerable discussion, the group concluded that the time was ripe for a national conference to share information and stimulate geographical research, teaching, and planning activities.

As it sought to organize a new professional organization, the group requested and received the support of three influential Latin Americanist geographers: Preston E. James (a member of the U.S. National Academy of Science's Committee on Geography); Arch C. Gerlach (president of the United States National Section of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History); and John P. Augelli (president of the newly-established Latin American Studies Association). The group established working committees on public relations/publications, local arrangements, program, and finances, for a first meeting.

By 1970, therefore, the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers (CLAG) was the first organization of specialists in the Association of American Geographers to establish its own independent structure and membership. This move prompted a succession of AAG specialty groups to form, including the Latin American Specialty Group (LASG) with which CLAG cooperates to the full.

CLAG is a non-profit organization governed by a Board of Directors elected by the general membership that has varied in

number between 200 and 300. Each of the 13 members of the Board serves three years. A rotation policy brings new members to the Board each year and retires members who have completed their terms. Officers of the Board are a Chair, a Vice-Chair, and an Executive Director who may be assisted in their duties by appointed staff. Committees of the Board are appointed by the Chair to undertake organization business; they include an Executive Committee as well as Honors, Membership, and Publications. The Executive Committee is responsible for the integration and facilitation of the activities and plans of the organization.

Meetings of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers are scheduled at eighteen-month intervals. These meetings, which have been held in Latin America, Canada, and Spain, as well as the United States, consist of volunteered papers on a general conference theme with a keynote address by a noted Latin Americanist. The first such meeting, in 1970, was funded by the National Science Foundation and the Social Science Research Council-American Council of Learned Societies.

The CLAG annual business meeting, open to all members, is held in April of each year, normally during the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers. One meeting at the beginning of each decade is devoted to an inventory of geographical research in Latin America in the preceding ten years and a discussion of prospects for the future.

During the 1980s CLAG made great progress in becoming a truly international organization; indeed, only two of CLAG's eight meetings since 1981 have been located in the United States. Latin American sites have included the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Colombia, Honduras, Peru, Costa Rica, Spain, and Guatemala.

Printed and electronic publications include the annual peer-reviewed *Yearbooks*, (1970-2001), now replaced by the two-issue a year *Journal of Latin American Geography*, Special Publications, Occasional Publications, Instructional Media, and the *CLAG Newsletter*. CLAG also maintains its own listserv. Further details of the organization are available at its website <<http://sites.maxwell.syr.edu/clag/clag/htm>>.

