

Robert B. Stephenson '63

MY 50 YEARS since June 1963 may be summarized as follows: Graduate school (Harvard); Fulbright (Australia); Lt. Cmdr. (U.S. Public Health Service); and then campus planner at Columbia, Cornell Medical College, University of Massachusetts and, for some years, a consortium of institutions in the Fenway area of Boston. That's it career-wise. But this was interspersed by two very long and memorable driving trips through Africa (London to Cape Town) and from England to India; and some climbing and jungle treks before and after; and then buying and renovating a c.1800 house in Jaffrey, New Hampshire; and about then becoming fascinated with the Antarctic; and unaccountably ending up on just about every board and committee in my town (to which I moved without knowing a soul). All through this, I kept reasonably healthy and in most case avoided trouble. I still occasionally find myself in Hanover (mostly at Rauner Library) and show up every now and then at a local Dartmouth Club event in southwest New Hampshire. Oddly, I remain a bachelor though I didn't start off with that goal in mind. Actually, I didn't start off with *any* goal in mind, come to think of it. Life just kind of flowed. Nothing particularly special to crow about, and no great achievements to report; but I have had a fair amount of enjoyment, met lots of interesting people and have never been at a loss over what to do next.

I'd like to elaborate on a couple of the points above:

Antarctic. Many classmates will remember Herb West, Professor of Comparative Literature. His course 'The Travel Writers' included Apsley Cherry-Garrard's classic treatment of Scott's Last Expedition, *The Worst Journey in the World*. I loved the book, and some years later, when in New York working for Columbia, I somehow got interested in book collecting. The advice given by those writing about book collecting—Herb was one—was always "specialize," otherwise you'll go broke and run out of room. So I decided I would collect Antarctic books, "how many can there be?" Well, quite a few actually. I now have 2,708 in my collection—some of which I bought from Herb or from the booksellers that he and I visited when we met up in London—and I, indeed, did run out of room though I haven't gone broke—yet. As a consequence I now have a purpose-built library in an old mill building in downtown Jaffrey. What was an avocation became a fascination, then an obsession and now the focus of roughly half my waking hours. As I sometimes say to friends, it keeps me off the streets.

Sixteen years ago I created my own non-profit (*no* by-laws, *no* dues, *no* annual meeting, *no* budget) called 'The Antarctic Circle.' You can visit the website at www.antarctic-circle.org. The name is a play-on-words as there is, indeed, an Antarctic Circle; but in this instance the Circle is a circle of friends, colleagues and Antarcticans of all stripes with an interest in the historical, literary, bibliographical, artistic and cultural aspects of Antarctica. I spend a lot of time trying to get people and information together and, as a result, have met face-to-face and via the internet people from all corners of the globe. Being a city planner, I figured I would never find a way to get to Antarctica other than spending a lot of money as a tourist. (Although if you have ever seen McMurdo

Station, the main American facility in Antarctica, you will wonder why a planner wasn't sent there at the very outset.) Well, I have been down now many times, almost always as a lecturer on tourist ships. It's been a lot of fun. Long before my first trip, as a form of vicarious travel, I started "collecting" places around the world *outside* of the Antarctic that have some sort of Antarctic connection: statues, houses, plaques, ships, and the occasional pub. (Well over 1,000 of these are described on my website in what I call a "Low-Latitude Antarctic Gazetteer.") My Antarctic interests have taken me many times to the world's premier polar facility, the Scott Polar Research Institute at the University of Cambridge. At the moment I am preparing for publication an expedition newspaper that was produced by Scott's Northern Party. The only known copy to survive is at SPRI. I also go each October to Athy in Co. Kildare, Ireland, near where the great Anglo-Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton was born. What takes me there is The Shackleton Autumn School, the most enjoyable polar gathering of the year, made better by the one of the best pubs in Ireland, O'Briens, just a stone's throw from the venue.

I'm now in the throes of organizing my own polar gathering, what I call a "SouthPole-*sium*" to be held in my town of Jaffrey in mid-June 2012. You probably attended lots of conferences over the years and you may have sat there and thought, like I have, that they should have done it this way or that way and, by golly, I could have done it far better! So I'm having a go at it, doing it my way. You can see how it went at www.antarctic-circle.org/gathering.htm

So pretty much every day now I drive the two miles from my house to downtown Jaffrey, to 8 Main Street, where you can find THE LIBRARY OF THE ANTARCTIC CIRCLE. If you're ever in Jaffrey, drop in for a visit.

Civic Activities.

Jaffrey is a town of a bit under 6,000. In 1977, when I bought my old house, which is in the Historic District, and started picking away at it, I became interested in historic preservation. This led to my getting involved with the Village Improvement Society, the Historical Society, the downtown Main Street program, and the statewide New Hampshire Preservation Alliance. Every few years the town Master Plan would be updated and I'd be on the Sounding Board. I helped found the Monadnock Conservancy, a regional land trust. I got interested in cemeteries and now head up the Cemetery Committee. I somehow ended up on the Energy Committee and the Moderator's Committee on Town Meeting and a few other committees that have come and gone. I'm the caretaker of our 1775 Meetinghouse. Google it and you'll see what a lovely New England building it is. I do several websites for the Town and have written a few books on Jaffrey history. The only elective office that's come my way is as one of three Trustees of Trust Funds; it's nice to be so close to so much money. I must enjoy all this because I keep saying "yes" when asked to help out.

So a typical day in my life seems to be mostly split between the far-away places of Antarctica and Jaffrey, New Hampshire. No condo in Florida. No Caribbean cruises. No complaints. And it probably wouldn't have worked out that way if Dartmouth hadn't been in the equation.

1159 Words

Two photos submitted: Stephenson,RobPic1 and 2. Include one or the other or both, your choice.

Caption Pic1: Researching a rare Antarctic book at the Morgan Library in New York. The *Aurora Australis* was printed in the Antarctic during Shackleton's 1907-09 expedition.

Caption Pic2: At the entrance to my Antarctic library in downtown Jaffrey, New Hampshire.