

LOUIS-EDMOND HAMELIN

"WE MUST BEAR NORTHWARD ... MUST SET OUT ON A TRUE MARCH
TOWARDS A REAL COUNTRY".

By: Jack Royle

DR. LOUIS-EDMOND HAMELIN HAS RESEARCHED "THE NORTH" (AND PARTICULARLY THE CANADIAN NORTH) IN EVERY SENSE — geographically, culturally and politically. No adventuring explorer, no scientist **with** his instruments, has sought harder to probe The North's mysteries to understand its "themes of location, dimension and **regionalization**", and to sort out its future.

Now semi-retired and living in a modest home in **Sillery**, a suburb of Quebec City, Dr. Hamelin has devoted most of his b'fe to his Northern **interests**. he has written **profusely** — some 200 **books** and other works — has taught and spoken extensively on the subject. The list of resulting recognitions and honors would more than fill this page. To select a few: He served as president of the **Societe de Geographie de Quebec**, as a member of the **Societe Royale de Canada** he received the Governor General's Award, the Order of Canada, the **Medaille** of Universite of Liege, Belgique; he won **the Molson** Foundation Prize and received Doctorates in Environmental Studies and other disciplines at the Universities of Waterloo, **McGill** and Ottawa. In 1989 he was one of few leading world figures to be named Correspondent to the prestigious **Institute de France**.

Dr. Hamelin set out early in life to **identify** and delineate "The North". His exhaustive study of history disclosed there was little of either written opinion or agreement on the subject. In the **Canadian** context he settled on a region pyramiding to the Pole and broadening southward to middle Canada. The North, by his definition does not include the well developed strip along the U.S. border where most Canadian **live**. This strip he defines as "base Canada" and looks for its inhabitants to be aware that their hope and future lies with "The North". These southern Canadians must develop increased understanding and common purpose with the vast generally misunderstood and untapped hinterland. All Canadians must develop "a true Northern Personality".

In "Forces", a publication of Hydro Quebec, Dr. Hamelin recently wrote: "There stems the necessity for a real effort to initiate a mental taming of "The North". Nordicity does not come of its own to anyone, particularly the southern urban dwellers. These polar differences, once recognized, could create desire to establish communication, closeness and interdependence between North and South (base Canada) resulting in an increase in value for **both ...** Let us hope that resolving North and Base Canada differences will extend beyond the national borders to create a **circumpolar g'lobalism**."

Fast moving events of these times are quickly giving substance to Dr. Hamelin's **insight**. Winter Cities movement leaders have frequently expressed the view that "mentally taming the North" is essential in making winter cities more livable and viable. How else can we be aware of who and what we are and begin to truly appreciate the wonders and blessings that come to us with winter's snow and cold. The movement (and the Winter Cities Association) have spread like wildfire around the northern world from China to Finland in the last decade so that Dr. Hamelin's **globalism** view has already come to pass. To complete the circle the Soviets will be participating at Winter Cities Tromsø '90 and doubtless in future events. (Dr. Hamelin is a member of the Winter Cities Association).

As he travelled through The North and lectured and wrote about it, Dr. Hamelin found it was

Louis-Edmond Hammelin

necessary to evolve or adapt new words to describe the reality. He thus gave credence to such words as "nordology", a study of the north in all its aspects; "nordicity", the degree of northerness applying to a particular location; "nordism", attitudes or activities indicating commitment to the north; "Polarology", total study of the cold zones of both hemispheres; and "VAPO", shortened form of "Valeurs polaires" or Polar Values. This is a unit of measurement for calculating an index of Nordicity which Dr. Hamelin created as an expression of the geographical northerness of a given place.

In "Nordicite Canadienne," published in French in 1975 and 1980 and English in 1979, Dr. Hamelin described a method of assigning a "Nordicity" rating to northern communities and regions. After extensive research at the Scott Polar Institute, Cambridge, England into past attempts at "northern indexing" he settled on ten "significant convergent factors", some geographic, some relating to human activities, as the most important criteria in determining degree of northerness.

The ten factors chosen: latitude, highest and lowest temperature ranges, presence of ice, precipitation, vegetation cover, surface accessibility, access by air services, population and economic activity. The North Pole was assigned 1,000 total VAPO rating and other localities were scaled according to their percentage out of 100 points for each factor.

Localities with total rating over 500, Dr. Hamelin classified as "Extreme North"; those with 200 to 500 VAPO were rated as "Far North"; below 200 were dubbed "Middle North". Below this category was Base Canada. Lines on the map could link communities of equal "nordicity" and give a basis for comparisons.

Fairbanks, Alaska, rated at 337 VAPO but Ellesmere Island at 956 was highest. Keewatin Interior, west of Hudson's Bay came in at 792 VAPO, colder and more severe than Spitzbergen which lies close to the 80th parallel of north latitude and rated 737 VAPO. Base Canada is the area below 200 VAPO.

In his writings, Dr. Hamelin notes that "The North", as defined, is shrinking as soaring world population increases the need for living space and resources. "The Canada of the South came about by digesting the most accessible and least harsh northern territories," and the process continues. Thus parts of Newfoundland, the north shore of the St. Lawrence and a slice of the upper half of the prairie provinces have experienced a reduction in VAPO rating and become part of Base Canada.

In 1971, the Government of Canada chose Hamelin to serve on the Council of the North West Territories at a time of discussion as to what form the Territorial Government should take. In five years of service on the Council he came to favor election of an Assembly. This would be a 2 step process first home rule and ultimate self-determination. He also urged native groups in the Territories to become involved in the political process and begin to speak up for their rights, constitutional and personal. For this work he was presented with the Massey Medal by the Canadian Geographical Society and the Grand Prix of the Societe de Geographie de Paris.

Born on a Quebec farm, Dr. Hamelin early developed a keen interest in nature and travels through northern regions sparked his curiosity as to what uses might be found for these empty spaces and what steps might be taken to prevent their despoiling. As a student at McGill university he received a Rockefeller grant (1948-1951) to permit him to study geography at Grenoble University, France.

Appointed to a professorship in Geography at Laval University, Quebec in 1951, he persuaded the university management to permit him to create a Centre for Northern Studies of which he was made

Director. Subsequently, he was second Rector of the Universite de Quebec at Trois Rivieres.

Louis-Edmond Hamelin prefers an adventurous and active life. One of his great joys comes on winter weekends when he meets with friends in a sugaring-off cabin on land he owns a few kilometers from Quebec City. The group lights a roaring fire and prepares food, then heads off for two or three hours cross-country skiing before coming back refreshed and stimulated to enjoy the meal.

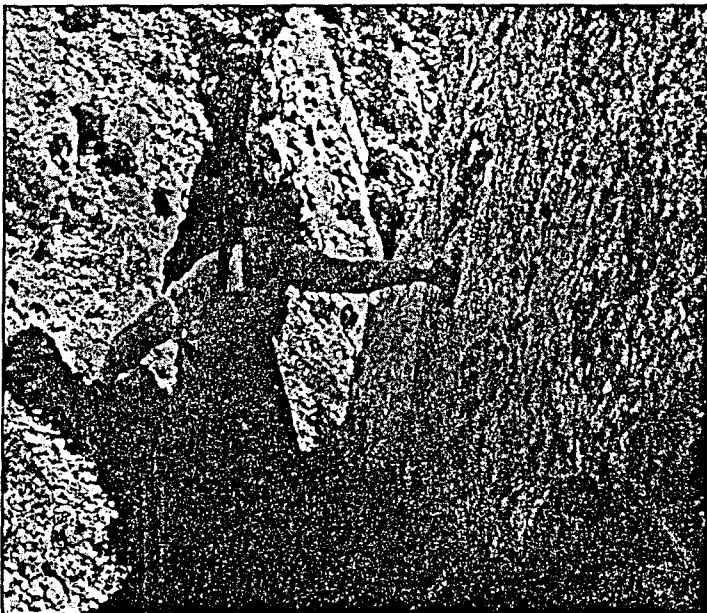
Favorite interests are mountain climbing and photography. He will shortly publish a "mystery book" with a factual base. A charter plane flying some years ago from Rome to Montreal crashed in the Alps and 58 Canadians lost their lives. Little attention was paid to the event at the time, but Dr. Hamelin visited the site when on a mountaineering expedition and discovered documents indicating foul play. His book giving his theories as to the cause of the crash should pique international interest. His wife, born in France and also a "professor of geography shares enthusiastically in his interests.

Dr. Hamelin's message to Canadians included in his article in "Forces".

"We must bear northward, face our problems squarely and not lose ground in nostalgic longing for idyllic warm-weather vacations; we must set out in a true march towards a real country. Then, perhaps Canada or Quebec could receive the prize proposed in Oslo in 1986 to be awarded to sufficiently ecologically-minded nations.

There are four objectives we would need to pace the way for such a Northern Renaissance: First would be cultural respect for the north and its historic inhabitants. Second would be respect for the natural environment, more fragile than in many parts of the world. This would be "respect for regionality that would foster interdependence amongst the main northern entities" thus reducing or eliminating regional disparity.

The last objective concerns the vision of Canada as a whole. Once The North becomes a real preoccupation of the country, Pan-Canadian affairs could no longer be decided solely on the mainstream of Canadian citizens. Our sense of 'national' (the country as whole) would cease to be confused with 'mainstream' or the South (Base Canada) where a majority of the influential and electoral population is concentrated."



Louis-Edmond Hamelin mountaineering in the French Alps August 19, 1987