

# SA study became grain benchmark

## PROFESSOR DONALD WILLIAM MEINIG

Geographer

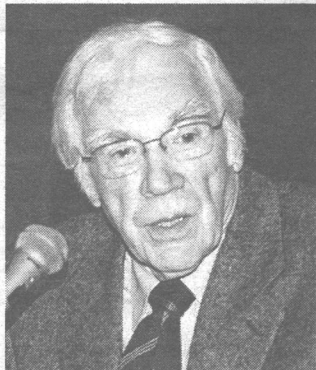
**Born:** November 1, 1924, Palouse, Washington, US

**Died:** June 13, 2020, Syracuse, New York, US

**D**ONALD Meinig was a distinguished American geographer who wrote an influential book on the South Australian wheatbelt published in the 1960s while on a scholarship at the University of Adelaide.

Donald was born in a major wheat-producing region of Washington state known as The Palouse.

His paternal grandparents moved from Saxony, Germany, to farm in the region in the late 19th century.



Donald joined the US army in 1943, serving until 1946. He then studied and worked at universities in Washington DC, Seattle and Utah for more than a decade. Australian geography professor Graham Lawton, a foundation professor of geography at Adelaide University,

mentored him in the early days. Lawton started working in the US because he could not return to Australia due to the war in the Pacific.

Donald married Lee and they raised three daughters – Laurel, Kristin and Lee.

In 1958, he won a Fulbright scholarship at Adelaide University, where he worked on the book *On the Margins of the Good Earth: The South Australian Wheat Frontier, 1869-1884*.

By the time the book was published in 1962 Donald had returned to the US, taking up a position at Syracuse University, where he remained for much of his career.

The influential book on SA describes the historical geography in relation to other wheat-growing areas across the world

also developed in the 19th century. It explores how farmers pushed north from 1869 on the back of good rainfall, despite the warnings of surveyor-general George Goyder. These farmers thrived for a short time beyond Goyder's Line – an imaginary boundary estimating the limits of grain farming.

New towns and railways were rapidly developed as permission to settle beyond the line was granted by the SA government after good harvests.

However, droughts in the 1880s stalled the frontier advance and Goyder's wisdom became clear. Ghost towns throughout the Mid North still stand as reminders of that time.

Donald focused his book on this region because of this interesting dynamic.

It appeared to take an outsider from the US to recognise the power of the story. The book had many good reviews, being described as a fascinating read, deeply researched, and wonderfully written.

After returning to Syracuse, Donald took 25 years to perfect his most recognised work, the four-volume series *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*. The ambitious work earned him the prestigious Presidential Achievement Award from the Association of American Geographers.

Donald retired in 2004 and died at Syracuse aged 95.

He is survived by Laurel, Kristin and Lee, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.