

“Ruins, Reputations, and Regulation: Byron Cummings, William B. Douglass, John Wetherill, and the Summer of 1909”, by Hal K. Rothman. *Journal of the Southwest* 35:318-340, 1993.

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Hal Rothman specializes in the history of the U.S. national monuments, both in the broad view (Rothman 1989) and focused upon specific Southwest monuments (Rothman 1988, 1991). This article takes up one of his major interests - the shift in the West from local and regional interests in management of Federal lands to national interests - and uses the formation of Navajo National Monument as an example.

The story begins with Richard Wetherill's excavations in Mesa Verde, Grand Gulch, but particularly Chaco Canyon, which gain him a reputation both among local “archaeologists” and in Washington as a pothunter and exploiter of American prehistory. Individuals in the Southwest such as Edgar L. Hewett pushed for a federal antiquities law to protect sites from people such as Wetherill. The resulting Antiquities Act of 1906 was partly due to the activities, real or perceived, of Richard Wetherill.

Rothman points out that Wetherill's archaeology differed little in quality from that of his contemporaries, but his lack of credentials was a critical difference. Actually, Rothman is unfair to Wetherill, as recent use of his fieldnotes (e.g., Atkins 1993; Reyman 1989) indicate that they are better than anything produced by Hewett (Mathien 1991) or his credentialed cohort Byron Cummings (ALC, personal observations).

It is shortly after the passage of the Antiquities Act that the events discussed in this article transpired. The players are John Wetherill, brother of Richard, Byron Cummings of the University of Utah, and William B. Douglass of the General Land Office. The story of the “discovery” of Rainbow Bridge and Betatakin in 1909 has been told many times, most recently by Jett (1992), and basically involves Cummings, guided by Wetherill, exploring the Navajo Country in search of ruins and natural bridges with Douglass doing the same thing, but also trying to keep an eye on Cummings, who he felt was no better than Richard Wetherill.

Rothman presents this as a battle between the self-trained Westerner (Cummings) and the representative of the government (Douglass) with the local “amateur” (Wetherill) caught in between. Actually, John Wetherill had more knowledge and experience than both Cummings and Douglass combined and both were dependent upon him to carry out their goals. Rothman presents Wetherill as a “romantic anachronism” but in fact he was quite level-headed and knew that whichever side “won” the battle would need his expertise.

The conflict between Cummings and Douglass was part of a larger pattern of western states vying with the federal government for control of archaeological and other resources. Douglass is presented as the “winner” because he was able to set aside a large tract of land as Navajo National Monument and took the first steps toward the government's taking responsibility for the resources there (not surprisingly, John Wetherill was appointed the first custodian of the monument). It does not appear, however, that any of this had much negative effect upon Cummings' activities, as Rothman implies. He continued to dig within and without the monument in his cavalier style until the 1920s when he moved on to ruins in the south. Cummings, then at the University of Arizona, also pushed for Federal monies for repair and restoration of the ruins in the monument and was recommended to carry out the task. As he was not a Federal employee, his nephew, Neil Judd, of the Smithsonian Institution carried out the work (Judd 1930:6-7).

Later in the 1920s, states' rights were still a hot issue and Cummings was involved in the passage of the Arizona Antiquities Act. This law required a permit from the Arizona State Museum (of which he was director) for

excavation on state or federal land and also required that 50% of the resulting collection be given to a public museum within the state (Wilcox 1988:22-23). This clearly unconstitutional law had a brief dampening effect on outsiders doing archaeology within the state but it is not clear if archaeology on federal lands were hindered significantly. Thus, although Douglass' work clearly established a federal presence in the archaeology of Northern Arizona, Cummings, hardly a loser, continued his activities pretty much unchanged within the new context and worked with the Federal system to his advantage.

This article is a condensed discussion of materials presented in Rothman (1991) and discussed in a national context in Rothman (1989), both of which have much of interest to the historian of archaeology.

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