

Praetzellis, Adrian

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#### **IV. Book/Journal Article Reviews**

*A Laboratory for Anthropology: Science and Romanticism in the American Southwest, 1846-1930*, by Don D. Fowler. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2000. 497 + xiii pp. \$49.95

by

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The southwestern United States became central to American anthropology early in the development of the discipline. Beginning with the Stevensons and Cushing at Zuni in ethnology and Cushing in the Salt River Valley in archaeology just about everybody who was anybody came to work and learn in the Southwest. For this reason, it is difficult to see the whole field in context and to discern how these scholars fit into the larger picture of American anthropology. Until now no one has put it all together.

Broken into 30 chapters, each of which has topical sub-sections, this book works best when taken small chunks to ponder and digest slowly. When read cover to cover as I did, it needs a timeline to keep track of who was doing what and when. The book provokes thoughts about patterns of people and events, a couple of which I will mention here.

The Wetherills - father Benjamin, sons Richard, Benjamin Alfred, John, Clayton, and Winslow, daughter-in-laws Louisa and Marietta, and, after the period of this book, grandson Milton, are extremely important in southwestern anthropology, not only for their archaeological, and to a lesser extent ethnographic discoveries, but as nexuses, through their Alamo Ranch in Colorado and later through their trading posts in Chaco Canyon, Oljato, and Kayenta, connecting many major anthropological expeditions in the northern Southwest. Nordenskiold, Cummings, Kidder, and Pepper are only a few of the scholars who worked with the Wetherills and relied upon their expertise while in the field.

Fowler makes an important contribution by illuminating the "black legend" of Richard Wetherill and his brothers. The Wetherills are credited with activities that led to the passage of the Antiquities Act of 1906, by people who were ignorant of the facts and found the brothers to be useful scapegoats. In fact, preservation was very much a part of the Wetherill family ethic. Richard's homestead claim in Chaco Canyon was an attempt to protect the ruins rather than to gain ownership of them for his own

purposes as claimed by many. And in the 1920s and 30s, John was closely involved in the failed attempt to make the Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley area a national park.

The Wetherills are important for another reason. Fowler presents comensurability as a theme of his book, but leaves the theme in the background without much explicit discussion. The extent to which the occupants of the Southwest, dead as well as living, were approached as equals, with something valuable to tell about their lives, is a significant component in examining the anthropological laboratory of the Southwest. Certainly Frank Cushing had such an attitude when many around him, including J. W. Powell, did not. The Wetherills appear to have basically accepted Indians on their own terms and considered archaeology inherently important, not as documentation of some lower level of human culture or as a resource to exploit. This later issue is particularly relevant to the Wetherill brothers who have been accused of earning large amounts of money looting sites of the Mesa Verde area, for which there is no evidence. There still remains much to do to place this family in proper perspective in late 19th and early 20th century Southwestern anthropology.

On another topic, the close connection between ethnography and archaeology in the pre-1920 period is particularly notable. Both Cushing and Fewkes began in ethnographic work, but were led by research questions as well as circumstances into archaeology. How often does this happen today? The separation of these two subfields of anthropology would be an interesting research question because although archaeologists continued to take courses in ethnography, they rarely combined research in both fields. After the period of this book, the archaeological work on the Indian lands claims cases of the 1950s runs counter to the general trend as does more recent work in ethnoarchaeology.

The book is so broad in scope that factual errors are bound to occur (e.g., Fort Ancient is in Ohio not Illinois [p. 207]), but these seem to be rare. One problem of note that is not unique to this book is attributing the discovery of the association of fluted points with extinct bison near Folsom, New Mexico to the wrong person. The story is fairly complicated and need not concern us here except for the fact that it was Carl Schwachheim (who fortunately kept a journal) and Fred Howarth who did the first excavation at the site and found the first artifact (Figgins 1927; Folsom 1973:142-146, 1974; Jackson 1997; Jackson and Thacker 1992). J. D. Figgins is usually given the credit for the discovery (e.g., Fagan 1977:285; Jelks 1988; MacGowan and Hester 1950:144; O'Brien and Lyman 1999:1-91; Willey and Sabloff 1993: 141), although he was not present at the site when the fluted point finds were made. Schwachheim is pictured with Figgins in Fowler's book (Figure 25.2), but only Figgins is identified. Figgins probably receives credit because it was he who published the finds. The Folsom story seems to be a hard one to get straight because there are at least two other people credited with the find. George McJunkin (the unnamed "cowboy" mentioned in Fowler's account), who may have found the site and got others interested in it [see Meltzer *et al.* 2002:7-8], sometimes receives credit for finding points associated with the bones [e.g. Hibben 1946:31-33], although he was dead by that time. Recently, Frank H. H. Roberts was credited with the discovery (*Encyclopedia Britannica Intermediate* on-line)!

This volume does a good job of putting almost a century of anthropological work into context and not only covers the great figures, for which we often have much published information, but many of the smaller players. The most important function that this book will serve is providing a single place to go for basic information on who did what and when in southwestern anthropology. I have already found it useful in my own work.

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