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New Light on the Beginning of the Pecos Conference

by

Richard B. Woodbury

Recently James E. Snead, a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History encountered in the department archives a letter from A. V. Kidder to Pliny E. Goddard. It is from "correspondence file 546 of the department archives, AMNH (A. V. Kidder)". With the approval of David H. Thomas of the Museum, it is published here.

26 April 1926

Dear Goddard:—

Absence from the Museum has delayed my replying to your letter of the 20th.

I hope to be in New York around the 6th or 7th of May and have an opportunity at that time of seeing

you and Erich [Schmidt]. I am planning to get together in the field this summer, as many active workers as possible, in order to thrash out a number of matters in regard to plans for work, nomenclature, cooperation, etc. etc. Do you think this might be done as a meeting of the Southwest Society? In that case perhaps Mrs. Parsons would be willing to issue a call. I would be very glad to do it myself and have the meeting at my camp at Pecos, but do not wish to appear to be trying to run things. Judd would also be glad to have such a meeting at his camp at Pueblo Bonito if that seemed a better place. Have you any knowledge of Mrs. Parsons whereabouts? Several letters I have written have remained unanswered and I imagine she must be abroad. If so, do you now when she expects to be back?

Very sincerely yours,

[signed] A.V.K.

We are grateful to James Snead for letting us know of this letter and assisting in its publication. It adds hitherto unknown details to the origin of the Pecos Conference, which Kidder convened at his Pecos field camp in August 1927, a year later than his original plan. Judd decided that Chaco Canyon was too far from the railroad over roads too often impassable, so Kidder invited archeologists to Pecos. The Southwest Society was founded in 1918 by Elsie Clews Parsons as a private philanthropy, giving support to many anthropological activities, mainly in the Southwest. Whether it was involved in supporting the Pecos Conference is not known—her gifts were usually not announced by her or the recipients.

This letter and its historical importance are a reminder of the value of archives. Letters that seemed of only brief significance when written can contribute usefully to the history of our discipline, in this case the beginning of the Pecos Conference, a landmark in American archaeology.

An Appreciation of Claude Warren and Susan Rose's
"William Pengelly's Techniques of Archaeological Excavation"

by

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The short (40 pages) pamphlet by Warren and Rose (1994) provides the answer to a complex question regarding credit for an important archaeological methodology, stratigraphic excavation. Let me set the stage for this appreciation.

Continuing research on the beginnings of stratigraphic excavations in North America (Browman and Givens 1996), I sought the origins of the idea of actually excavating by strata, rather than post-facto interpretation, seen in North America as early as 1895 in the work of Henry Chapman Mercer, but not really introduced into the repertoire of American techniques until the work of Gamio, Kidder and Nelson between 1911 and 1914. The roots of the latter three seemed to lie with individuals such as Reisner, Boas, Uhle, who in turn seemed to rely on Hugo Obermaier, Gabriel de Mortillet, Marcellin Boule, and perhaps Pitt-Rivers, while Mercer's work could be traced to Boule and Albert Gaudry. Doggedly following back the roots, I found that Chapman (1989) could make a reasonable case that Pitt-Rivers had actually learned of the idea of stratigraphic excavation from Evans, Prestwich, and Lubbock, from the British scientists working with the Upper and Middle Paleolithic excavations during 1858-1868.