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Author: Emslie, Steven D.

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Steven A. Weber and the Birth of the Society of Ethnobiology

Steven D. Emslie¹

Abstract. The origin and early history of the *Journal of Ethnobiology* and Society of Ethnobiology in Arizona in the late 1970s and early 1980s are reviewed in respect to the contributions of Steven A. Weber. The roles of Lyndon Hargrave, James Stuckey, and Prescott Center College in this history are documented, along with the events leading to the incorporation of the non-profit Society of Ethnobiology in 1981. Steven Weber became the first President of the Society and remained active in Society meetings and business throughout his career. The Society continues to grow and expand, with new publications established in recent years. The *Journal* also remains strong and is now published quarterly. Steve Weber's support and involvement in the Society and the field of ethnobiology over the past four decades has left a lasting legacy that will continue to influence students and professionals for many more decades to come.

Keywords: *Journal of Ethnobiology*, first ethnobiology conference, Max C. Fleischmann Foundation, Prescott Center College, Society of Ethnobiology founding

Introduction

This paper is about the early history and formation of a society that still thrives after 37 years and the early career of a distinguished ethnobiologist, Dr. Steven A. Weber, who helped create it. Here, I will focus on Steve Weber's formative years as an archaeologist and ethnobiologist in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when we were colleagues and business partners in Flagstaff, Arizona. There are many other accomplishments in Steve's career, including his important work at Harappa, the discovery for the earliest evidence of curry in India, and his research on ethnobotany. It is quite appropriate, though, that this issue of the *Journal of Ethnobiology* is dedicated to Steve in recognition of his long and successful career as an ethnobiologist and archaeologist. The diversity of topics covered in this issue reflect that success.

In forming the Society of Ethnobiology, Steve and I did everything backwards. First, there was an annual conference in ethnobiology already established in 1978. Second, we started a *Journal of Ethnobiology* in

1981 as a new outlet for researchers in this field, and third, we initiated the non-profit Society of Ethnobiology later in 1981. I review this sequence of events here and how Steve and I crossed paths early in our careers to eventually develop the Society. After so many years, memories can fade or even change. I am fortunate that I have an extensive archive of notes, letters, journals, and documents in my files dating back to before I met Steve. In addition, I was able to visit Steve twice in Portland, Oregon, in October 2016 and March 2017 to help fill in gaps in my memory and to peruse his archives on the *Journal* and Society, some of which are presented here as appendices. I even made a pilgrimage in March 2017 to Prescott and Flagstaff, Arizona, where the first ethnobiology conference was held and where we initiated the *Journal* and Society, respectively. All of this has allowed me to reconstruct events to complete this history as accurately as possible. Finally, while this paper is more about Steve's role in the history of the Society, it is necessary to give some of my background information that

¹University of North Carolina, Department of Biology and Marine Biology, 601 S. College Rd., Wilmington, NC 28403 (emslies@uncw.edu)

led to our meeting in 1978, as it is pertinent to how the Society ultimately was formed.

I first met Steve Weber in June 1978 after I was hired by Peter Pilles, Jr., U.S. Forest Service, to conduct archaeological surveys for a new project in Coconino County and the Flagstaff, Arizona, region. It was called the Stumpwood Project because the surveys were being completed ahead of removal of tree stumps by heavy machinery that would damage the ground surface and, thus, clearance was required for cultural resources. The stumpwood sale was experimental, to see if the stumps were suitable for making turpentine. Steve had already been working for Peter and the Forest Service since that spring, conducting surveys and excavations, so it was not long after I arrived that we met. We spent some of the summer working with high school students enrolled in the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) to complete test excavations at Elden Pueblo, the first such excavations since Jesse Fewkes worked at this site in the 1920s (Figure 1). The site has been used

each summer since 1978 as part of USFS public outreach with K-12 schools and the Arizona Archaeological Society field school.

As Steve and I got to know each other on the Stumpwood Project, we found that we had many common interests in ethnobiology. I was studying faunal remains from archaeological sites and he had begun working on pollen samples for Dr. Richard Hevly, Northern Arizona University (NAU), in August 1978. This work eventually became the basis for his Master's thesis at NAU, which he completed in 1981. Steve had been studying archaeology since 1974 and had participated on numerous field projects in Florida and Arizona. He received his B.A. in Anthropology from NAU in 1976 and had been involved in survey and excavation work since then. We began going out for beers after work at some of the local bars in Flagstaff and I recall having many long discussions on archaeology and ethnobiology. My background up to then included having

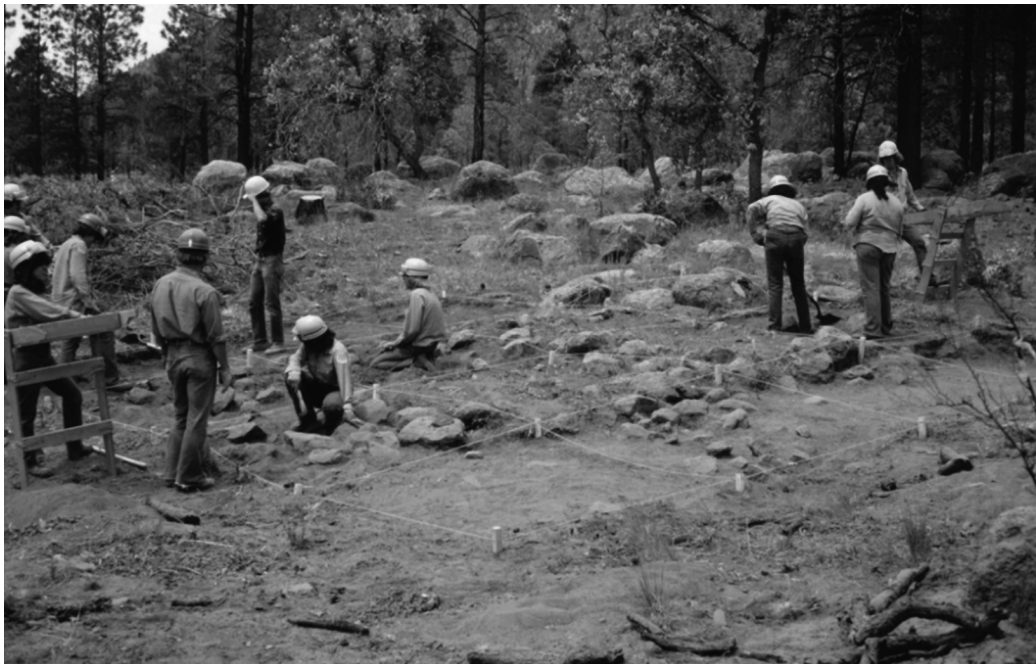


Figure 1. Excavations at Elden Pueblo, Flagstaff, Arizona, in July 1978. Steve Weber is in the back left, adjusting his hard hat.

completed my Master's thesis in Anthropology at the University of Colorado Boulder in May 1977. My thesis research was on faunal remains from archaeological sites in Mancos Canyon, Colorado, and, in fall 1977, I moved to Prescott, Arizona, to work with Dr. Lyndon Lane Hargrave, or Lyn, the only archaeo-ornithologist in the western United States. I first met Lyn in December 1976 when I received a small grant from the University of Colorado (\$225, of which \$175 was a consultation fee to Lyn and \$50 was for my travel expenses) to travel to Prescott to start learning bird bone identification from Lyn for my thesis research. After that initial research visit, Jim Stuckey, President of Prescott Center College, where Lyn had been teaching a course on ethnobiology, obtained a grant of \$26,400 from the Max C. Fleischmann Foundation for me to work with Lyn for three years to help him complete and publish some of his remaining projects. It was a great opportunity for me to not only work with one of the greats in southwestern archaeology (and one of only two WWI veterans I ever met), but also to continue learning new skills at bird bone identification.

Lyndon Lane Hargrave and the First Ethnobiology Conference

The Fleischmann grant also included funds to host an annual conference on ethnobiology in honor of Lyn for the duration of the award and stipulated that all these conferences would be held in Arizona. I have to admit that it was not a part of the work that I looked forward to doing. I was just a young graduate student, with no experience at organizing conferences, and I had no idea how to begin. I was hoping that Jim would forget about this part of the grant but, in October 1977, he reminded me about this and asked what we could do for planning the first conference. Thus, the initial idea for an annual conference in ethnobiology originally came from Jim Stuckey, in honor of Lyn Hargrave's career, to be held in Arizona for three years,

as stipulated in the Fleischmann grant. To my knowledge, Jim did not envision the conference as something that would continue beyond the period of the grant.

In fall 1977, I began to set this all in motion, deciding on a date for the conference (April 7–8, 1978), with papers to be presented in the former chapel, now a large lecture room, at Prescott Center College. I began contacting Lyn's colleagues, at his direction, to invite them to present papers at the conference. I prepared an announcement that I took with me to other conferences, including the Plains Conference, held in Lincoln, Nebraska, that November, to pass out and spread the word. I also presented a paper at the Nebraska conference, simply titled *Ethnobiology*, where I gave information on the Fleischmann grant and projects that I was completing with Lyn. I announced the Ethnobiology conference at the end of this paper and provided fliers at the information desk. Soon, I began to receive enthusiastic replies and registrations for the conference. The registration fee was \$2.00 per person and the banquet was \$6.00. Lyn had corresponded with another zooarchaeologist for many years, Dr. Paul Parmalee, but they had never met, so I invited Paul to be the keynote speaker at the conference. He agreed and the program was completed with a series of papers by many of Lyn's colleagues, divided into four non-overlapping sessions over two days. The best moment of the conference, though, was when Lyn rose to speak at the banquet. He gave a moving and lucid account of his life and career and thanked everyone for their attendance. I only regret that there was no one there to record it. Paul then gave a very nice presentation on his research on aboriginal use of birds on the Great Plains. I also was able to arrange a special issue of *The Kiva* to publish the proceedings of this conference and coordinated submissions and reviews for this issue which was published in 1979 (Vol. 44, combined Nos. 2-3).

Throughout the first year with Lyn, his health was variable, and he frequently went to the hospital. He was 81 years old at that time, but he was in good spirits for the conference. Later that summer, though, Lyn's health declined further and he passed away on July 22, 1978, at 82 years of age. I was very glad that he lived long enough to see the First Ethnobiology Conference held in his honor and receive recognition for a lifetime of work in this field. His comparative collections and library were moved to the Museum of Northern Arizona in Flagstaff, as stipulated in his will. Since I now had the summer survey work there, it made sense to move to Flagstaff full-time to complete the next two years of the grant (which Jim wanted to continue) and to begin taking classes at Northern Arizona University. Lyn had inspired me to expand my education into the biological sciences and to become more interdisciplinary in my training.

Flagstaff and the Second Ethnobiology Conference

I spent the academic year of 1978-1979 taking classes, working on more of Hargrave's papers, and preparing for the Second Ethnobiology Conference, to be held at the Museum of Northern Arizona. Alfred F. Whiting, another well-known ethnobiologist, also passed away in 1978. Whiting was an ethnobotanist who worked extensively with the Havasupai in Arizona and was intending to publish an ethnography of this native group when he died. It was quite appropriate, then, to honor him, along with Lyn Hargrave, at the second conference, and a special symposium was arranged with series of invited speakers, all experts in various fields of ethnobiology, to participate. At that time, it was the intent of the museum to also publish all the papers from this special symposium.

The second conference went quite well and many new students and established scientists learned about these annual meetings. Although the museum was hosting the

conference, the actual venue was at the Flagstaff Elks Lodge, where there was more room for attendees. The special symposium, thanks to the efforts and support of the museum, included a *Who's Who* of highly recognized ethnobotanists, ethnozoologists, and ethnographers, including Drs. Richard Ford, Don Grayson, H. Ronald Pulliam, Amadeo Rea, Harriet Kuhnlein, Brent Berlin, Robert Bye, Jr., Eugene Hunn, Gary Nabhan, and Darrell Posey, among others. More importantly, many of these individuals would also become the first editorial board of the *Journal of Ethnobiology*, and later the first Board of Directors of the Society of Ethnobiology. For Steve, his attendance at the conference led to an interest in Al Whiting's research on the Havasupai. Steve and a faculty member at NAU, P. David Seaman, began to compile all of Whiting's notes and data from his work with the Havasupai, which Whiting had given to David. Eventually, this led to Steve's first book, co-edited with David, *Havasupai Habitat*, published by the University of Arizona Press in 1985. It was quite an impressive achievement for someone who was not even a Master's student yet when the project began.

In summer 1979, Steve left for a survey job at Shasta National Forest, California, while I went to work as a faunal specialist for the Dolores Archaeological Project in southwestern Colorado. Later that summer, Steve was nearly killed in a traffic accident on a logging road while going to work. A truck started to pass him illegally while he was making a left turn and smashed into the side of his car. He lost his spleen in that accident, but recovered and returned to Flagstaff to begin his Master's research that fall. I also returned that fall and continued taking classes at NAU, working on the Dolores faunal remains, and completing the last year of work under the Fleischmann grant. Throughout that academic year, Steve and I continued to interact regularly and work in the field, helping a colleague with an archaeological excavation in the

Verde Valley.

I was also busy helping to plan the third ethnobiology conference, to be held at the University of Arizona, Tucson, in late March 1980. Gary Nabhan and others at the University had volunteered to organize that conference and it was the perfect place to hold it to continue gaining recognition for the field of ethnobiology. It also kept the first three meetings in Arizona, as per the Fleischmann grant and Jim Stuckey's wishes. Meanwhile, though a special issue of *The Kiva* had been released with selected papers from the first conference, the publication of the special symposium from the second conference was lagging. It turned out that the Museum of Northern Arizona was short on funds and could not keep its commitment to publish those papers. This turned out to be fortuitous for Steve and me in starting the *Journal of Ethnobiology*.

Center for Western Studies and the *Journal of Ethnobiology*

In March 1980, Steve purchased a new house in Flagstaff at 824 W. Birch because the city block where his then current house had been located was taken by the city to build a new city government building. At one point that summer, I asked Steve if he would like to form a business together where we would identify biological materials from archaeological sites on a consultation basis. I was working on faunal remains from many sites besides the Dolores Project by then, and now I felt confident in identifying both bird and mammal remains. Steve was becoming an expert on pollen and botanical analyses and had many projects as well, including the work with Dr. Richard Hevly at NAU, so it was a perfect fit for a partnership in a new business venture. We incorporated as the Center for Western Studies (CWS) on August 25, 1980, a broad name that would allow expansion into other areas of research or study. We had discussed other names before this, including the Center for Western Studies in Biology and Archaeol-

ogy, or Bio-archaeology, but decided on the shorter version. Importantly, while Steve and I had previously discussed the need for a journal that focused on ethnobiology, now he insisted that we include a journal with the business. It was a great idea and, without his insistence, the *Journal* may not have started as it did.

The business was based out of Steve's new house and we used two rooms for offices and another for those we hired to work on projects with us. We also developed a brochure for the business (Supplemental Figure 1) and asked other experts in various fields of ethnobiology (faunal, seed, and pollen analyses) to be consultants for us when we needed additional expertise. One of these consultants was Dr. Amadeo Rea and I have a copy of a letter I wrote to him to invite him to be a consultant that indicates we had established the idea for the business by June 15, 1980. We also decided on using a split-twig figurine as our business logo, a perfect symbol representing the use of plants and animals by prehistoric peoples. I had become familiar with these while working with Lyn, as he had two of them on loan in his lab in Prescott that I saw when I first began working with him. Little did I know then that many years later, during my Ph.D. research on fossil condors in Grand Canyon, I would be discovering figurines and figurine sites and publishing new information about them, including one paper in the *Journal of Ethnobiology* (Emslie and Coats 2013).

After forming CWS, Steve and I began to solicit papers for the first issue of the *Journal of Ethnobiology*. Our business brochure gave some of the details about this proposed new journal (Supplemental Figure 1). Also by this time, the annual conferences had picked up momentum and a fourth conference, now independent of the Fleischmann grant, was already being planned at the University of Missouri Columbia, hosted by Dr. Deborah Pearsall, in March 1981. We thought the first issue of the *Journal* could include proceedings from

this fourth conference and, in November 1980, I began inviting established experts in the field (many of whom we had met at the second conference) to serve on the editorial board of the new journal (see invitation letter dated November 15, 1980, Supplemental Figure 2). However, Drs. Richard Ford and Harriet Kuhnlein made another suggestion. They both had papers submitted for the special symposium from the second conference that the Museum of Northern Arizona (MNA) was committed to publishing. However, by fall 1980, one and a half years since that conference, no publication was forthcoming. Richard and Harriet also knew that these papers were ready for publication and could easily be transferred to the new journal. Why not ask the museum if we could publish those papers as the first issue? So, late in the fall of 1980, Dr. Ford wrote to Marsha Gallagher at MNA, who had coordinated the second conference with me, and she readily agreed to turn over the papers to us for publication, which we received in January 1981. By then, the editorial board for the *Journal* had been established, comprised

mostly of the distinguished ethnobiologists from that special symposium.

I began working on all these papers as the first editor of the *Journal* to develop a common format that would be used in the *Journal* from then on. I remember having to retype all the papers so they would have a common format and I chose one similar to that used by the *Journal of Mammalogy*. All of this had to be done before I could give the papers to a typesetter, the next step in having them printed. We hired Linda Desmond of I'm Your Type in Flagstaff to do this and she was our typesetter for many issues of the *Journal*. Once typeset, they were ready to be turned over to a printer. Steve had contacted a number of printing presses, both in Flagstaff and elsewhere. Eventually, we settled on a Flagstaff company, The Print Shop, Inc., who gave us a quote of about \$6000 for 1000 issues at 200 pages per issue. Meanwhile, Steve and I traveled together to the Fourth Ethnobiology Conference in Missouri in March 1981, stopping at my parent's house in Ft. Collins, Colorado, on the way, where my mother took our photo, the only one of us together from those early years (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Steven D. Emslie (left) and Steven A. Weber (right) in Ft. Collins, Colorado, March 1981. Photo taken on the way to the Fourth Ethnobiology Conference in Columbia, Missouri.

Formation and Growth of the Society of Ethnobiology

At the fourth conference, the editorial board met for the first time, as well as a steering committee for the annual meetings. It was at these meetings that fund-raising to support the *Journal* was discussed and it was suggested that donations could be solicited more easily if we had a non-profit status, thus allowing tax-deductions for any donations. It was an excellent idea and Steve and I pursued it as soon as we returned to Flagstaff and finished publication of the first issue of the *Journal*. After getting that first issue mailed to subscribers, Steve and I submitted the paperwork to establish a new non-profit Society of Ethnobiology and it became official in November 1981. Steve became its first President while I served as *Journal* Editor and Secretary/Treasurer. Our early correspondence, beginning with the invitation letter to join the Editorial Board, provides the chronology for all these events up to immediately after the Fifth Ethnobiology Conference in San Diego in April 1982 (Supplemental Figure 2).

It is important to note that, while Steve and I were co-directors of CWS, we published the first four issues of the *Journal* (Vol. 1 and 2) under this business. We prepared a separate brochure just on the journal that we sent out to many libraries and individuals (Supplemental Figure 3). Printing 1000 copies of the first issue, though, was not cheap and we didn't have enough subscribers to cover the costs. We needed funds to jumpstart the *Journal* and Steve came through on this, providing a series of loans to our business, eventually totaling \$7000, to ensure it would move forward. Although there were a few problems with the printing (83 of the 1000 copies had defects or were without covers), the journal overall looked great and we received 24 boxes, containing around 40 issues each, from the printer that we stored in Steve's garage. We also packaged and sent them to all the subscribers from that garage in late June 1981 (a month after

the proposed release date of May 1981). Subscription rates were \$15 for individuals, \$22 for institutions, and we had about 40 subscriptions in March 1981. So, one could legitimately say that the *Journal* began out of a garage!

Things began to build from there. By October 1981 we had up to 300 subscriptions to the *Journal* and eight more papers reviewed and accepted for publication. I continued as editor for the second issue of Volume 1 and then Steve and I co-edited the two issues for Volume 2. By fall 1982, though, Steve left Flagstaff to begin his Ph.D. program at the University of Pennsylvania and I began mine at the University of Florida in 1983. Before we parted, we met at a bar one night and made a series of bets, which the winner of each was to buy the other dinner: who would get their Ph.D. first, who would publish in *Science* first, and who would get married first (the winner being the one not getting married)? It turned out that I won all three and Steve did provide the dinners! As we became engrossed in our Ph.D. programs, we had to find a new editor for the *Journal* and we were fortunate that Dr. Willard Van Asdall, at the Arizona State Museum, Tucson, took over this important duty in 1983 and remained editor for the next nine and a half volumes (19 issues of the *Journal*). He and his able Associate Editor, Karen Adams, kept the *Journal* on track with their countless hours of unpaid service and dedication, without which we would have had a very difficult time keeping the *Journal* alive.

Still, we had to struggle at times in finding enough papers to fill an issue, having it printed on time, and maintaining a strong base of subscribers. The conference also struggled, with some meetings better attended than others. At one point, Steve and I were uncertain about the future of the Society, conference, and *Journal*, but Steve maintained steady attendance to the conferences and kept it healthy through his efforts and work with the Board of Directors. We have to give a lot of credit to our

Board of Directors and Society officers for shepherding the society through some tough times. When the eighth conference in Boston nearly collapsed from lack of organization and late announcements, Jan Timbrook stepped in as the first conference coordinator. Her efforts, with Harriet Kuhnlein, to develop a set of conference guidelines to give to hosting institutions each year saved the conference, and probably the Society as a whole, at that time. By the ninth conference, held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, momentum had recovered and the meeting was very well organized and attended. From then on, the conference remained on stable grounds and the Society grew.

Conclusions

Today, the *Journal of Ethnobiology* still thrives and each issue is packed with articles that continue to reflect the large international body of research in ethnobiology. Publications by the Society expanded in 2010 with *Ethnobiology Letters* by editors Steve Wolverton, Cynthia Fowler, and David Cozzo, and in 2013 with *Contributions in Ethnobiology* by editors Marsha Quinlan and Dana Lepofsky. The first is an online publication that provides an outlet for short papers and notes, while the second is both online and print that supports longer papers and monographs. Thus, these two new publications significantly expand on the *Journal of Ethnobiology* and the international recognition of the Society. In addition, the *Journal* also expanded from two to three issues per year in 2014, then to quarterly in 2016, something both Steve and I had always hoped to see as the *Journal* grew. In looking through all these publications, the scope and breadth of the research is remarkable. The Society membership has been growing as well and the financial struggles of those first few years are long gone. Now, the membership includes not only some of the original conference attendees, but others who joined later and

some that are new each year. Steve and I may have initiated the Society, but it is the membership that has ensured its success.

Both Steve and I are proud of what the officers and membership of the Society have accomplished over the years. We are confident that there will be a centennial meeting of the society in 2078 and that the contributions, publications, and enthusiasm for the society will remain substantial and significant. Without Steve, the *Journal* and Society of Ethnobiology might not exist and he will be remembered the most for his role in their formation. In closing, I recently told him about the philosophical belief that you actually die twice: once when you first pass and again when all those who knew you, your living memory, also pass. Steve said no, there is a third time—when everyone stops talking about you. In that case, I believe Steve will live for a very long time indeed.

Acknowledgments

This paper could not have been completed without the help and support of Steven A. Weber. I thank him for hosting me at his home in Portland, Oregon, where he provided access to all his files on the early history of the Society. I also thank Jim Stuckey for meeting with me in Prescott, Arizona, in March 2017. Without his early support for me to work with Lyn Hargrave, none of the events described in this paper would have happened. Finally, I thank the officers and members of the Society of Ethnobiology who, over the years, have kept this group alive and prospering with their countless hours of volunteer work and dedication. It is truly a remarkable group of people.

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