

R. F. HEIZER AND THE HANDBOOK OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS

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My association with Robert F. Heizer and my knowledge of his manner of work and thought, and his personality, was gained in two periods separated by over 20 years. As an undergraduate at Berkeley in the fall of 1948 I was a student in a course he taught, called "The American Indians: Central America, Mexico, and North America." The wording of the course description sounds as though it may have been several decades old even then, although one can see now how it might have included ethnohistory: "Development, spread, and attainments of culture; native races and languages." The texts were Kroeber's (1939) Cultural and Natural Areas and selections from Wissler's (1938) The American Indian. My class notes indicate that the lectures omitted Central America and included little on Mexico. More than two-thirds of the time was devoted to ethnology and culture history. Except for the early archaeology ("peopling"), the material was presented in the then current mode of an essentially timeless "ethnographic present". I find nothing in my notes that corresponds to modern ethnohistory (except for some discussion of the effects of the fur trade on the cultures of the Northwest Coast), and almost no history (except for brief conventional treatment of historic movements onto the Plains and a short account of the introduction of horses). The lectures on California Indians were largely devoted to summaries of Nisenan and Yurok cultures. It was after 1948 that Heizer developed his strong interests in history and ethnohistory, and his realization of the distortions inevitable in attempts to reconstruct a fictional ethnographic present (cf. Heizer 1978b: 4).

After I left Berkeley in 1949 I lost contact with Heizer. I remember a brief visit to the Berkeley department one afternoon in the mid 1960s when I dropped in on him unannounced; he looked at me rather coolly, partly because of my east coast clothing, until I mentioned my name, whereupon he explained "I thought you were a book salesman." Three or four years after I became General Editor for the new Handbook of North American Indians in 1965, I had settled on volume editors for most of the 20 volumes but was unsure about whom to ask to edit the one on California. Heizer was certainly the most prominent possibility, but I hesitated, until I was strongly urged to invite him by an advisory panel (consisting of Fred Eggan, Mary Haas, T. Dale Stewart, Sol Tax, and Gordon R. Willey) that met in Chicago in 1970. When I spoke with him, Heizer readily agreed and added, with his usual shrewdness and frankness, "I'm not hard to get along with, provided it's not my own project." It is difficult now to remember my hesitation, for he was a joy to work with -- supportive and innovative about planning the contents, very responsible and systematic, an excellent manuscript editor, a facile author, and a great correspondent. Nearly all the Handbook volumes were planned simultaneously during 1970-71, and authors for all of these were invited at about the same time. The general format for all was then established; Levi-Strauss (1979) has correctly deduced an underlying structure of which we were not explicitly aware. So the fact that California was the first published does not mean that it was in any important way a model for the contents of the other volumes. However, the

techniques that Heizer developed for dealing with authors and their manuscripts were of great assistance in editing subsequent volumes as they advanced further in the production process. The reason the California volume appeared first is that Heizer was so energetic and efficient at editing, rejecting, replacing, and improving what the many authors submitted. He knew almost every possible author and had been the teacher of a good many of them. He wrote several chapters himself, when no one else could be found who was both able and willing to do them, and contributed many unsigned paragraphs (and some major rewriting) to others.

Only he could have produced anything resembling the final results. His breadth of knowledge of the topics to be covered was unexcelled -- not only of substantive matters in all areas of the anthropology and history of California Indians, but also of approaches, manuscript and published sources, and the scholars who controlled the data (including their weaknesses as well as their strengths). His influence and authority over other specialists was particularly important for the success of the quite drastic editorial intervention in manuscripts that is required by the encyclopedic aims of the Handbook.

Heizer was much concerned that the coverage of the volume be as complete as possible, spatially, temporally, and topically. The evenness of coverage of all historic groups in the area is perhaps better than what can be achieved in Handbook volumes on other culture areas. This is partly the result of the relatively short span of documentation on California Indians, but also partly because of Heizer's thorough knowledge and his concern that no identifiable societies be omitted. The temporal coverage is perhaps not so successful at the modern end, for although Heizer recognized the importance of 20th century social and cultural changes, he was not as insistent as I sometimes wished that they be covered in this reference work. His allusion (1978c: 15) to "ethnosociology" is indicative. The topical articles at the back and front of the volume, cross-cutting the major organizational scheme by ethnic groups, are more prominent in the California volume than they will be in several others. This coverage is incomplete and unsystematic, as Heizer himself recognized, but it does go part way towards lessening the duplication between "tribal" entries that Heizer recognized Kroeber's volume (1925) had successfully avoided by its primarily regional organization (Heizer 1978b: 5).

One influence of Heizer's editorial work on subsequent volumes is in the matter of referencing. My original guide for contributors suggested that an encyclopedia requires less full and meticulous documentation of sources than many other kinds of writing. Heizer pushed us away from this, thereby increasing the reference usefulness of the whole Handbook, and showed some of the ways in which such referencing can be included yet kept relatively unobtrusive. He was much concerned that sources should be credited, and that the best sources should be used. Many times he recognized an author's unmentioned sources and supplied them; a few times he caught instances verging on plagiarism and corrected them.

Heizer and I agreed on what we considered theoretical excesses. Both of us tried to translate downwards the more theoretical passages. Often, we agreed, if one

rewrites or edits out jargon and stylish catch-phrases, and cuts out the theoretical introductions and conclusions, the results seem more true as well as more readily comprehensible. Sometimes Heizer refrained, however. On one occasion he remarked apropos of his decision not to try to persuade some authors to shift their interpretations of early historical California Indians sociopolitical systems, "They make them sound like Mexicans /i.e., members of preconquest Mesoamerican states/, but I suppose this too will pass." He thought these interpretations were over-corrections of earlier stereotypes about the nature of California societies, but would let them stand if it were made fairly clear that they are interpretations of weak evidence.

In agreeing to take on the onerous task of editing, I think Heizer had two things in mind. He agreed with the usefulness of an authoritative summary of anthropological and historical knowledge of the native peoples of North America, and he wanted to be sure that full justice was done to California in such a project. The large, scattered body of information should be responsibly used and interpreted. The present and future descendants of California Indians deserve and need access to their true pasts. The contributions to knowledge of the large number of native California informants ought to be recognized -- he urged inclusion of a list of their names and dates, which he published elsewhere (Heizer and Nissen 1973) when it became clear that this idea could not be applied in most other Handbook volumes. His second concern was to be worthy of his mentor A. L. Kroeber and produce a volume to place beside his monumental Handbook of the Indians of California (1925). He did not see the volume as competing with or replacing Kroeber's. I recall thinking that Heizer was too modest, although certainly sincerely so, in the comparison of Kroeber's work with his own (and that of the other editor and all the contributors) that he wrote in his "Introduction" (1978b: 5) -- and I think I toned it down a little. In December, 1975, Heizer wrote me regarding a disagreement over revising Kroeber's ethnic classifications in southern California, "All I can say is that it is good that Kroeber died in 1960 and not 1980. But, as someone said, 'If Mozart was as old as I am now, I would have been dead for 15 years.' "

At least as regards the Handbook, I do not think that Heizer saw ethnohistory as something very special and distinct in methods or approach. Rather, it is just another way of finding out about Indian cultures and Indian life of the past. One puts together data from archaeology, history, biography, the history of anthropology, and earlier ethnography, regretting all the while the scarcity in earlier days of ethnographers and of literate and articulate native statements. Ethnohistory is a kind of faut de mieux ethnography and history.

When it was clear that the California volume would be the first to be published, Heizer wrote me (17 Jan. 1978) wondering why, suggesting facetiously that "having recently surveyed the ethnohistorical literature, I realize that this was the easiest volume to write," because that literature is so weak due to the extraordinarily prejudiced 19th century Anglo attitudes towards California Indians.

In November, 1974, Heizer wrote me suggesting the need for a chapter on mythology: "It is just that the subject is so important in world view and is, at the same time, the only history which these people had." The manuscript that resulted was not entirely what we hoped for. So, very late in the editing process, he sat down and quickly wrote out the chapter titled "Natural Forces and Native World View," mailing it on March 31, 1976, complete except for a concluding paragraph. He wrote me that "I couldn't think of a way to end it, so it just stops. If you like the rest, give me a suggestion on a closing thought and I'll supply it." I did like the rest, and sent him a paragraph that he accepted. Finding those sentences in the files, I'm surprised to see them in my own handwriting; the ideas, at least, must be Heizer's.

These are the kinds of concepts Native Californians developed to understand their worlds and to serve as guides for their behavior in them. Europeans destroyed or radically altered much of the environment and introduced by force or precept very different ways of conceiving the relations of man and nature. Ancient and efficient ecologies were disrupted before adequate and sympathetic records could be made that would promote understanding of what must have been a whole series of different integrated native philosophical systems (Heizer 1978d: 653).

Something of what it was like to cooperate with Heizer on the Handbook can be gained from an extract from a letter he wrote me on Feb. 1, 1973, which also gives a good idea of his informal literary style and something of his interest in personalities. This section is from a report on the status of various Handbook manuscripts.

I saw X, the man, on his 790 acre ranch at Grazos Creek, about 10 miles below Pigeon Point Lighthouse on the coast on Sunday, January 27. It was an experience of a kind that one has only a few times in his life. X is 80, but you would never guess it. When I dropped in on him he was delighted to see me because he thinks of me as Kroeber's successor (a bit misinformed on this point, and including a little extrapolation or projection), and he laid on all of his homespun charm -- and he has a lot. (I interrupt here to tell you about the single English maid, afraid of the prospect of spinsterhood, who each night knelt beside her bed and prayed: "Dear God, please send me a man to share my lot -- nobody knows what a lot I've got.") I have had, I would guess, as much correspondence with X about his article as I have had with Y and Z, but nothing comes from it. So I go to see him, and it is kind of a transcending experience to sit and listen to this old guy talk (I mean the kind of talk that one listens to for hours without the privilege of your saying anything.) (I am reminded here of another experience of 20 years ago in Shasta County when, while trying to locate ethnographic Shasta village sites for a claims case project, and for which I was never

paid by the crooked lawyers, I finally nursed my car out to a really remote ranch, was met by a couple of very large, very loud, very tough-looking Shepherd dogs with large mouthfuls of very large white teeth, and a guy who looked like an old mountain-man, not unlike /X/, carrying a 10-gauge shotgun that probably was not loaded with sofa pillows. After a little palaver, he asked me to "get down" (i. e. not from my saddle horse, but from my sedan) and come inside. So I did -- he had those two dogs and the shotgun so, even if I had been reluctant, I clearly did not have much choice. Inside was his wife who never said a word for the next three hours. I didn't say anything for three hours either -- not because of the dogs or the shotgun, but because the poor old guy had long ago run out of things to talk about with his wife, to whom he had probably been married for 40 years, and he was just plain crazy lonesome. Well -- playing Job when you are short on time and funds gets wearing, so after several hours of having my ears assaulted, I got up, said I had to leave, shook hands with his still silent wife, shook his hand, thanked him (for what? I can't even recall any of the fascinating tales he told), got in my car, turned around, drove out to the gate, and found him there with his shotgun and his two big dogs. I wanted to get out and open the gate, but he was leaning against the door, and his two dogs had started to foam at the mouth again, and they both seemed to be acting as though they were mighty hungry and wouldn't mind having a big bite of me, so I sat some more and listened /to/ more of the same -- whatever it was. Finally I said, "Mr. _____, I really have to get on, so do you mind opening the gate so I can get to _____ by dark?" And then he said, "I see you have to leave, but I don't like to let you go, 'cause I ain't hardly talked out yet.") Now, there is not any real point to this recollection, except that it is the kind of experience of encountering isolated and lonely people which must today be some thing which is more and more rare. I could tell you another one, even more interesting, from Mexico, but I spare you this lest you think I am playing the same game as /X/ and the old Shasta County briar hopper. Anyway, I saw /X/, and he did his best to get "talked out." And when I left he promised to write a second version of his paper. I suspect that in the end we will have to find another author, but I would like to be the one to let him down if that is necessary. Perhaps if a few more visitors come by he will get talked out and written up. /He never did./