

R. F. HEIZER AND THE MERRIAM COLLECTION

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Although this symposium concerns R. F. Heizer, I will, because of my particular topic, first say something about C. Hart Merriam. Merriam, born in 1855 in New York City, was raised in upstate New York (Lewis County). He very early became an amateur naturalist interested in birds and at 17 was a member of a natural history expedition to Yellowstone. He was a Yale undergraduate and received an M.D. degree from Columbia University in 1879. He practiced medicine for six years but during all this time his real vocation was as a naturalist; he continued collecting birds and expanded into collecting mammals, not then very fashionable. In 1885 he moved full time into the naturalist business by establishing a section on Ornithology in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Entomology. Successful empire building led this to become the Bureau of Biological Survey. Merriam had considerable influence in the government of the period. His father had been a two term congressman and apparently knew the right keys to turn in Washington. During his time with the U.S. Government Merriam was responsible for an enormous amount of biological exploration and himself described more than 600 new species of mammals.

Merriam also made very powerful friends during this time. In 1899 he was the scientific director of the E. H. Harriman expedition to Alaska. Harriman was the principal owner of the Union Pacific Railroad and therefore of great influence. Merriam also became closely associated with Theodore Roosevelt while in Washington. Roosevelt had a great interest in natural history and sought out Merriam when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy (1897) and the association persisted through and after his presidency. While Theodore Roosevelt was President he and Merriam engaged in a public debate on the variation of coyotes and wolves in the western U.S.

By 1910 Merriam had had enough of Federal bureaucracy and had also found a new intellectual interest, the California Indians. Accordingly there was established a trust fund, the E. H. Harriman Trust Fund, administered by the Smithsonian Institution which was to provide Merriam with an income for life to do work of his choice. The money for this was provided by E. H. Harriman's widow and the whole scheme was engineered by a group of Merriam's friends which included Teddy Roosevelt. Merriam thus moved to California and for the rest of his life collected material on the California Indians.

Merriam approached this problem as a naturalist. His primary concern was with the precise location and distribution of the people he was studying. As Kroeber (Merriam 1955: ix) said "His work was empirical, basic, and oriented toward attainment of precision and completeness." Merriam published some of his California Indian material (32 items from 1903 to 1930, see Merriam 1979 for bibliography) but the largest part of the material he collected (I recall six file cabinets at the time I worked on it) remained unpublished at the time of his death in 1942. The Merriam files were

left in the custody of the Smithsonian. Merriam appears never to have had close relations with other workers in California ethnography (except J. P. Harrington). He was never on good terms with A. L. Kroeber and in fact is said by Heizer to have been instrumental in keeping Kroeber out of the National Academy of Sciences for several years (Merriam 1979: 4). Heizer speculates (Merriam 1979: 5) that Merriam was unhappy with Kroeber's preeminence in a field they had entered about the same time.

Whether or not this was so, Merriam's daughters (Mrs. M.W. Talbot and Mrs. Henry D. Abbott) apparently did not feel hostility and thought that Merriam's material could be put to better use in California than in Washington D. C. and therefore they arranged for custody to be transferred to the University of California, Berkeley in 1950. In practical terms this meant that R. F. Heizer was the custodian since he was the only Californianist in the Berkeley Department (Kroeber had retired and Gifford was working in Fiji). The remainder of the E. H. Harriman Fund was made available to the Department to use for publication of the material.

The first project undertaken was the publication of Merriam's material ready or almost ready to go. This material appeared in 1955 as Studies in California Indians under Merriam's name but "Edited by the Staff of the Department of Anthropology." Kroeber wrote the introduction to this but it is clear that Heizer was principally responsible for the volume. Its publication was funded by the E. H. Harriman Foundation.

Heizer and Kroeber then took another step by asking the Smithsonian to finance a research assistantship so that a graduate student could work on some Merriam material. I was the first one of these, hired in the year 1955-56. Kroeber and Heizer say (Baumhoff 1958: iii) that after discussion they agreed that California Athapascans should be the topic and that "under their direction" I "patiently" assembled the material. I don't remember any discussion -- possibly they discussed it with each other. I don't remember being patient and certainly there was no direction. What happened was that I was hired to extract any information available on the California Athapascans and was left entirely on my own. Merriam's notes had a lot of excellent locational information so it appeared that it would be most useful to try to establish group identities and boundary locations. By accident I also happened on some unpublished data of P. E. Goddard and was able to pull together a fairly useful monograph on the subject (Baumhoff 1958).

The next year G. L. Grosscup was given the "Merriam Fellowship," as we then called it. He was evidently assigned the Panamint Shoshone as his topic. His paper was published by Heizer in Contributions of the Archaeological Research Facility in 1977.

Apparently the practice of awarding research assistantships was discontinued thereafter -- at least I have found no mention of anyone else. During the next few years Heizer pulled some small items out and published them. Then in 1966 he published his Languages, Territories and Names of California Indian Tribes which was essentially a

comparison of Merriam's map and Kroeber's map of the native peoples of California. This was basically Merriam's material and publication was financed by the E. H. Harriman Fund.

Subsequently Heizer published four major parts of the Merriam materials all under Merriam's name (1966; 1967; 1967a; 1968; 1970; 1976; 1977; 1979).

The first five items above were financed by the E. H. Harriman Fund. In 1974 this fund was exhausted. To publish the sixth and seventh items (ethnogeography) Heizer obtained a grant from the Mary W. Harriman Foundation (E. H.'s widow). After that the Harriman money ran out. Heizer told me he had asked for additional money but was turned down. The last item was published commercially by Ballena; it turned out to be posthumous for Heizer as well as for Merriam.

Altogether Heizer was responsible for about 1700 pages of publication of Merriam's material under Merriam's name. He was also responsible for about an additional 200 pages published under the names Heizer, Grosscup, and Baumhoff. How useful this will be remains uncertain since it has not yet been much used. I know that for my own purposes the ethnogeography has turned out to be very useful indeed. I suspect the Indian names for plants and animals will also be very useful, especially for purposes of historical reconstruction. According to Heizer there remain in the files ethnogeographic data for Central and Southern California and also some scores of word lists. It would be helpful to have someone complete the work of Merriam and Heizer.

Heizer says (Merriam 1979: 2) that his work on the Merriam material was "selfless." Of course it was no more selfless than anything anyone does, particularly R. F. Heizer. Nevertheless there may be less selfishness here than in many of his acts. He was fond in his last years of denouncing the use of J. P. Harrington's material under the names of other authors and comparing favorably his own treatment of the Merriam material. The comparison is quite unfair -- the Merriam material was superbly organized and obsessively neat while the Harrington material is, I understand, just the reverse. Furthermore Heizer did publish some Merriam material under his, my, and Grosscup's names.

Yet the fact remains that he did not simply pirate the material when he was in a position to do so and I know it must have been a terrible temptation. I'm glad he resisted it.