

THE KROEBER ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY, 1949-1969

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The Kroeber Society has completed 20 years of active life, and it has fallen to me as one of the "founding fathers" and first president of the Society to review the beginnings of the organization. This is particularly appropriate in a volume dedicated to John Rowe, for the history of the Kroeber Society is a part of John Rowe's own history at Berkeley. The founding, organization, and continuance of the Society have all depended to a great extent on the encouragement, guidance, and able direction provided by Rowe from the beginning.

I am both pleased and proud, and slightly surprised I must admit, to realize that the Kroeber Society has survived and flourished for 20 years. The activities of all those concerned with the founding of the Society were so dominated by the pressing problems of keeping the Society alive, particularly in the first years of very inadequate resources, that none of us thought ahead to the possibility that our Society would continue and eventually have a history of its own. The record of accomplishment is a remarkable one. I know of no other anthropological student organization that has maintained, for 20 years without interruption, its own scholarly publication series supported entirely by volunteer effort and the resources of the students and members of the group. A number of similar organizations have been started in anthropology departments elsewhere in the U.S. and most of the larger departments experience intermittent efforts to develop something comparable to the Kroeber Society. The life-span of such organizations is short, however--many never get off the ground at all, and of those that are born most perish at a tender age. There are very good reasons for the high mortality rate, since the business of being a major or a graduate student in a good department is very demanding and consumes, as we

all know, the full time and energy of the student. To be involved, in addition, with the writing, editing, and practical production problems of a journal is a most rewarding experience but also a substantial burden for the student. It is, therefore, a tribute to the energy of the Berkeley student group through the years that the Kroeber Society and its journal have continued through many student generations.

The beginnings of the Kroeber Society took place in a departmental setting quite different from the present one. The Berkeley department was much smaller, only about a third of its present size in both faculty and graduate students. The available student labor for the Society's activities, particularly for the work of producing the KAS Papers, was correspondingly limited, and the volunteers credited in the early Papers included nearly all of the active majors and graduate students in the department. Labor resources were a major problem since there were always some non-participants among the student group and an even larger number of students who wanted to help but simply could not because of conflicting responsibilities of seminar reports and similar pressures. Since the members of the Society did all the necessary chores, including mimeographing the Papers, collating, proof-reading, and the like, it was difficult in the beginning to muster enough man-hours of volunteer time to get all the work done.

There were also some differences in the make-up of the student group in 1949. Most of the men and some of the women were veterans whose education had been interrupted (mostly on the undergraduate level) by military service in World War II. This group tended to be slightly older than the average students on the same academic level. In addition, most of the veterans were very conscious of the years they had lost from their career pursuits and many felt that they had some time to make up. This in turn led to a high degree of professional motivation and a wish to complete student requirements and get on to professional work in anthropology as soon as possible. It should also be added that most of

these students were subsidized by the G.I. bill so that they could, and did, devote full time to their student pursuits without the necessity of losing time out while working to pay the rent.

The nature of this student group was probably the main factor leading to the formation of the Kroeber Society. There had existed at Berkeley for many years an "Anthropology Club" which provided opportunity for social interaction and occasionally organized lectures by visiting speakers [I remember one of the best of the lectures being presented by Carl Sauer who delighted in baiting the anthropologists and did a most effective job of it]. However, the anthropology club was somewhat intermittent in its activity and seemed insufficient to many of the students who wanted to replace this largely social organization with a group of more scholarly purpose. This student group, which wanted to do anthropology as well as talk about it, conceived the notion of a scholarly organization which would publish its own journal in anthropology.

It is impossible to pick a single person as the originator of the Kroeber Society. There was a general feeling among the students that something more than the old anthropology club was needed, and the topic was discussed informally among most of the students. In addition, there were at least two or three small groups of students who got together on the basis of personal friendship to discuss ways and means of organizing the new society. These groups were spontaneous and met independently of one another so that I am unable to identify the persons involved--in any event, all of the groups coalesced at the organizational meeting where a more formal structure was developed. My own preliminary meetings were with F. A. Riddell and Catherine McClellan, and we three (among others) went to John Rowe for advice and guidance from the faculty.

Discussions were held with other staff members at Berkeley, and the whole faculty provided support for the Kroeber Society from the beginning. However, the working relationship between students and faculty hinged on the participation and guidance of John Rowe and it is to him

that much credit for the birth of the Kroeber Society should be given. While I appreciated his contribution in 1949, I have a far greater appreciation of it in 1969 since I can now look at the problems from the faculty point of view as well as the student point of view. In recent years I have had students come to me in much the same fashion that we went to Rowe, also with ideas for a student publication series. It is at these times that I am most aware of the essential contributions made by John Rowe to the Kroeber Society, and also to the demands and problems that any such organization must bring to the faculty advisor in terms of his own duties and responsibilities as a professor.

John Rowe provided three essential things for the Kroeber Society. These merit individual discussion since it is doubtful that any student society (certainly any student publication) can survive without them. First, of course, is the matter of encouragement. No group of students, however highly motivated, really knows enough to launch a publication series of scholarly quality without some advice and encouragement from the trained professional scholars. It is to John Rowe's credit that he encouraged the students to go ahead with their plans even though he saw [far better than we did] the size of the task and the implications of the publication program for his own time and responsibility.

A second essential need for any student enterprise is continuity. Most of the students involved in the organization of the Kroeber Society were gone from Berkeley within three or four years, and continuance of the Society required some knowledgeable person who could transmit the experience and guidance of the past to the new student generation. It is only a faculty member whose long-time career is at Berkeley who can provide this continuity and communicate the tradition and goals of the organization to the new student groups. It is also the faculty member who can take action to maintain the student group when it falters or moves away from its scholarly purpose. This role was ably carried by John Rowe through the critical early years of the Kroeber Society.

A final contribution of equal importance was John Rowe's expertise as a professional scholar. As a student, much of my learning of the nuts and bolts of scholarship came from work done for Rowe. Absolutely essential matters such as the proper use of sources, proper bibliographies, and care and precision in preparing scholarly writing, were stressed by Rowe in his teaching, and his own high standards of scholarship were adopted from the beginning of the Kroeber Society. This is a critical area for any student publication, since students, who are themselves learning how to do professional scholarship, simply do not know enough to publish a professional journal without some rigorous editorial guidance. It is largely to Rowe's credit that members of the Kroeber Society do not have to be ashamed of the scholarly quality of their Papers, not even the beginning Paper No. 1. It is also a credit to Rowe and the Society that the articles published by the Kroeber Society are regularly cited in professional journals and that the scholarly results are of sufficient quality to merit reprinting of the out-of-print Papers by the Johnson Reprint Corporation. It is worth mentioning that the very first article published in the Papers (Chard's article on contacts between North and South America) remains a useful contribution 20 years after its first appearance.

A few brief historical facts concerning the early days of the Kroeber Society should be added. The current members probably do not know that their Society came close to being named the Putnam Society, after the first head of the Berkeley department. This issue was vigorously debated at the organizational meeting of the Society, but the majority of the students felt themselves too closely identified with Kroeber to consider any other choice for the name of their Society.

The principal concern of the Society members in the first year of existence was the launching of the journal. We did not want to begin the Papers only to see the operation fold after a year or two, and a major effort was made to get off to a solid beginning with three issues

of the Papers scheduled for the first year. This was a tremendous task, both in obtaining material of high quality and in editing and production. The Society had no printing equipment, very little money, and limited time available from the volunteer students who did the work. In retrospect, I doubt that I would try this again, and I certainly think of that year when students discuss with me the starting of a student journal. However, we made it and demonstrated that it can be done with sufficient time and energy from the student group.

The importance of scholarship and the Papers to the Kroeber Society has meant from the beginning that the editor of the Papers is really the most important of the Society's officers and the one whose commitment of time and responsibility is the greatest. The first editor, Richard Bachenheimer, spent uncounted hours in getting the Papers launched and devoted just about all of one year to the Society. As first president, my own role was somewhat ceremonial and whatever useful work I did was in helping the editor to get out the labor force, along with my share of the collating and proof-reading chores. The high spot of my presidency was the presentation of our first published paper to R. H. Lowie, to whom the issue was dedicated.

The value of the Kroeber Society to students has been great during the past 20 years. Many of the student members have gained valuable experience in professional scholarship and have gone on to hold professional positions in anthropology--a review of the list of student volunteers in the first year of the Society shows a considerable number of persons who are today professors of anthropology in many Universities throughout the country. For these people at least, the Kroeber Society was a valuable activity during their student days and work for the Society made its contribution to their professional development. It served, therefore, exactly as it was intended by its founders.

For the future, I foresee two dangers for the Kroeber Society which are worth mentioning. Predicting the future goes somewhat beyond

my charge in preparing this historical note, but having gained the status of an "old timer" who is permitted to write reminiscences, I claim the accompanying privilege of predicting the future.

First, partly due to the growth in size of anthropology departments, anthropology seems to be becoming more of a business and less of an intellectual adventure. It is to be hoped that the Kroeber Society can maintain its original goals of scholarly endeavor and that it can continue to put scholarship first and all other activities second in its future development.

Related also to the problem of department size, there is the risk that the Kroeber Society will become a clique and will no longer actively involve all of the students willing to participate, including the undergraduate majors. After 20 years of development, the Kroeber Society runs the risk of becoming a student establishment with all the shortcomings of any establishment with crystallized organization and less attraction for the beginning students who are most apt to profit from involvement with the group.

Having avoided these two problems through its organizational years, largely through the help and wise counsel of John Rowe, I am optimistic that the Kroeber Society will continue its success for the next 20 years and I look forward to the record of its further activities and publications.