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Anthropology and the Academy of Science: The Need for a New Role

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ABSTRACT

Few anthropology papers were presented at the Annual Meetings of the Arkansas Academy of Science before 1968. Establishment of the Arkansas Archeological Survey in 1967 brought an influx of professional anthropologists to the state and a subsequent increase in the number of anthropology papers published. However, the growth in number of active anthropologists has created a need for more information channels within the state. The time is right for the Anthropology Section of the Academy to become a formal base for interaction and information dissemination among anthropologists.

The Arkansas Academy of Science was formed at a meeting in Little Rock on January 11, 1917. The call for formal organization was made by Mr. Troy W. Lewis, a Little Rock attorney. Though adopting the idea of an annual meeting, the Academy met only once in 1917 and not again until October of 1932 when Mr. Lewis once more attempted to organize the professional scientists throughout the state.

The first regular annual meeting of the revived Academy was in Little Rock during the spring of 1933 (Ham, 1941). From 1933 to the present, the Academy has met annually at the various colleges and universities around the state. The *Proceedings* of the Academy began publication in 1941 as a result of the 25th Annual Meeting (Vol. I). Volume II of the *Proceedings* was published in 1947 and then, beginning in 1950 (33rd Annual Meeting), the *Proceedings* has been published regularly after each annual meeting.

Over the last six decades social sciences in general have not been actively in the mainstream of the Arkansas Academy of Science. Sociology, history, geography, psychology and anthropology all have been conspicuously absent in contrast to other participating sciences such as chemistry, agriculture, biology and geology (compare the *Proceedings* from 1941 to 1974).

During the six years from 1950 to 1955, a total of six papers which come under the heading of general anthropology were presented at the annual meetings of the Academy. These papers were presented during such sections as Sociology (1952-53, 1954), Social Research (1951) and Sociology/Anthropology (1955), which included an additional 27 papers concerning psychological, sociological or historical phenomena. One paper of which the main thesis was archeological was presented during the Sociology section of the 1955 meeting. Of the total number of papers presented during these six years, 11 were submitted for review and subsequently were published in the *Proceedings* of the Academy.

During the next 12 years (from 1956 to 1967) there was an overall lack of participation on the part of social science sections. No papers even remotely concerned with anthropological data or theory were presented to the Academy.

At the 1968 meeting of the Academy an anthropology-oriented revitalization movement began. The Arkansas Archeological Survey had been established during July of the previous year (1967) and the state realized a sudden influx of professional anthropologists. During the 1968 meeting, Survey archeologists presented six papers on the prehistory of various regions in the State of Arkansas. Although none of the papers were submitted to the Academy for publication, they were

submitted to and published by the Arkansas Archeological Society (1969). Since the reinstitution of anthropology to the Academy in 1968, there has been a constant (though not overwhelming) interest in the meetings on the part of students and professionals alike. From 1968 to 1975, 52 papers have been presented in the Anthropology or Archeology/Anthropology Sections of the Academy. Of these only 10 concerned general anthropology, whereas 42 were specifically archeological in scope. The publication record of the years 1968 to 1973 (including those papers published by the Arkansas Archeological Society) is commendable (see Volumes XXII-XXVII of the *Proceedings*). Of the 38 papers presented during this period (1968-1973), 17 were submitted for review and were published by the Academy.

Though the growth of the Anthropology Section within the Academy is encouraging, its spirit and the role it plays in the professional community still must be viewed with a critical eye. Approximately 30 professional anthropologists currently reside in the State of Arkansas, in addition to perhaps half as many graduate students. As the number of active anthropologists has grown, so too has the need for open formal and informal information channels. Unless information flow mechanisms expand in proportion to the number of potential participants within the system, few will benefit from the combined knowledge those participants hold.

Stated another way, and perhaps more to the point, the current rate of information flow among professionals in this state is staggeringly minimal. This situation leaves most anthropologists virtually unaware of the sometimes relevant activities carried out by colleagues. If the discipline is expected to grow, either in numbers or maturity, this problem must be attacked directly.

The time is right for the Anthropology Section of the Arkansas Academy of Science to be built into a formal base, supported by all the professionals, whose goal is to provide a nonpartisan mechanism through which participants may interact and disseminate information.

Interaction and information dissemination are the two key concepts. The role of the Anthropology Section needs to evolve in a direction which will adequately facilitate them.

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