

FROM THE ARCHIVES

As part of our 100th Anniversary Celebration, David Wilcox is contributing several articles on the deep history of AAHS. Here is the first.

Chronicling the Utah “Game Plan” Cummings Brought to Tucson in 1915

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A relatively new research tool for investigating early archaeological studies is called “Chronicling America.” Put these two key words into a Google or Yahoo search, and you will be taken to a free website created by the Smithsonian Institution in collaboration with the Library of Congress. There, you can select a state or the District of Columbia, a date range bracketed from 1836 to 1922, and key words to search on. So, let’s say we select “Utah” between 1893 and 1915, and the key words “Byron Cummings.” Almost immediately, a page of thumbnail images of a set of individual pages in old newspapers appears with the key words highlighted in red. Double click one and zoom in, and you can read what is said about Byron Cummings or his wife Mrs. Byron Cummings – and let me tell you, there are a lot of newspaper pages where they were mentioned!

In his excellent 2006 biography *Byron Cummings*, Todd Bostwick says he found that data about the origins of Cummings’ archaeological work in Utah “remain sketchy.” He did have unpublished manuscripts by Cummings curated by the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson, and he found correspondence between Cummings and Edgar Lee Hewett, an agent of the Archaeological Institute of America, of which the Utah Archaeological Society of 1905 had become a branch chapter in 1906. Using “Chronicling America,” it is now possible to fill in more detail. Not only is there an account of when Mitchell Carroll came to Salt Lake City to organize the new branch group (*Salt Lake Tribune*, April 14, 1906, p. 10), as well as one of Hewett’s visits soon after (*Salt Lake Herald [SLH]*, May 4, 1906, p. 12),

there is also a long account by Cummings of his first archaeological expedition to Nine Mile Canyon by himself, on horseback, during the summer of 1906 (*SLH*, October 14, 1906, Mag. Sec., p. 15). Meetings of the Utah Archaeological Society are quite regularly reported, often with information on the lectures by Cummings or his students, and the way the meetings were conducted – which was just the way he did it with the AAHS once he brought his “game plan” for such things to Tucson.

Of even greater interest, Cummings used the Utah newspapers to author long reports about his expeditions (with photographs and maps; for example, *SLH*, August 4, 1907, News Sec., p. 6; *SLH*, November 1, 1908, Mag. Sec., p. 12), as did his nephew Neil Judd (*SLH-Republican*, April 10, 1910, Drama Mag., p. 3). By reaching out to the people of Utah in this way, Cummings was able to articulate what he believed they should agree was the value of his archaeological investigations to them, and the reasons why they should support his work at the University of Utah museum, and in the Utah Legislature – which did pass funding bills to do as he requested! These same values Cummings brought with him to Arizona and the Arizona State Museum (ASM) at the University of Arizona in Tucson in 1915, after his principled stand against the president of the University of Utah, J. T. Kingsbury, concerning the academic freedom of students led him to resign (at age 55) and to seek employment elsewhere. These archaeological values constitute what we can call a “game plan,” or agenda for what he believed a scientific, professional approach to the study of archaeology should entail, one he successfully implemented in Arizona to the end of his long life, publishing his last book about his results, *The First Inhabitants of Arizona*, at age 93 in 1953!

Just as the Utah Archaeological Society was a support group for his archaeological activities in Utah, AAHS became one in Arizona, and later, the Hohokam Museums Association added further support for his game plan. Clearly, as Bostwick seeks to explain, Cummings’ ideas about what was interesting and important about the archaeological record of Utah and Arizona were different from the conceptions later held by “cultural historians” like his student

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Emil Walter Haury, and different again from the conceptions of even more recent practitioners of what we like to regard as “professional archaeology.” Cummings believed that human artifacts themselves were art objects of intrinsic value whose study should be “accessible to all” in public museums that kept these objects in the region from which they derived so local, western people and their children could learn about the history of civilization that they documented. His ideas in his own time during the early twentieth century resonated with many influential citizens in Utah and Arizona and are not uninteresting to many art lovers even today. By understanding these values, we can hope to understand how the collections still being curated in state museums like ASM came to be assembled, why they were thought important, and what can be done to restore their public, symbolic meanings for the education of all of us today.

