Project Report

Native Plants and Native Peoples: A Community Workshop at the Sam Noble Museum^{*}

Daniel C. Swan and Paul Minnis[†]

Abstract: This project report describes a workshop—Native Plants and Native Peoples—held on August 8, 2014 at the Sam Noble Museum, University of Oklahoma.

[Keywords: *Botany, Ethnobotany, Plants, Cultural Ecology, Sustainability, Ethnoscience, Traditional Knowledge*, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Heirloom Species. Keywords in italics are derived from the American Folklore Society Ethnographic Thesaurus, a standard nomenclature for the ethnographic disciplines.]

On August 8, 2014, the [Sam Noble Museum](#) hosted *Native Plants and Native Peoples*, a community workshop on botany, agriculture, and education.¹ The motivation for the event came from Dr. Paul Minnis, Professor *Emeritus*, in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. Based on his conversations with other academic ethnobotanists, Minnis believed that such an event might foster new forms of community collaboration and research. Fifty-seven individuals attended the workshop, including representatives of 12 tribal communities from Oklahoma and academics and research scientists from the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, and the Botanical Research Institute of Texas. A key audience for the workshop was faculty and students from a range of disciplines and programs at the University of Oklahoma including Anthropology, Microbiology and Plant Biology, Native American Studies, Geography and Environmental Sustainability, the Health and Exercise Program, the Center for Applied Social Research, and the Office of the Vice President for Research. Notable attendees included Henrietta Mann, President, Cheyenne Arapaho Tribal College; Daniel Moerman, Professor *Emeritus*, University of Michigan-Dearborn; Steven Bond, Technical Assistance Specialist from the Intertribal Agricultural Council; and Will McClatchey, Vice President for Research at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas.

The workshop featured a series of reports on a broad range of community projects in botany, agriculture, and education. The first presentation was by Stephanie Berryhill of the [Mvskoke \(Creek\) Food Sovereignty Initiative](#) (MFSI). She provided an overview of the efforts of MFSI to promote healthy lifestyles through sustainable agriculture, economic development, and cultural

^{*} This project report was accepted for publication after editorial review on September 1, 2014. The journal's Project Reports section presents accounts of research and outreach projects undertaken by *Museum Anthropology Review*'s institutional partners. The work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

and educational programs. Important MFSI initiatives include the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program and the Revitalizing Mvskoke Foodways Program.

Gordon Yellowman of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and Tucker Blythe of the National Parks Service presented on the Native garden located at the [Washita Battlefield National Historic Site](#). This interpretive garden and its associated media provide an opportunity for visitors to learn about how Cheyenne and Arapaho people made use of plant resources as foods, medicines, and domestic materials. The garden at the Washita Battlefield Site also provides a healing and contemplative environment for members of the Cheyenne community to cleanse their minds and bodies after visiting the site of horrific events in the history of their community.

Pat Gwin from the [Cherokee Nation Administrative Support Department](#) reported on a range of ethnobiology programs at the Cherokee Nation. Signature programs include the Cherokee Seed Bank and the Cultural Forestry initiative. These anchor efforts work to preserve the genetic integrity of heirloom species and promote the protection of the non-tree species in forest environments. Time limits did not permit Gwin to speak to the important efforts of the Cherokee Nation to propagate viable stands of river cane, a vital resource for the continued production of traditional Cherokee basketry and mats. The efforts of the ethnobiology projects of the Cherokee Nation also include a range of endeavors to document and perpetuate both plants and knowledge to use them in traditional settings.

Deborah Echo-Hawk from the [Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma](#) spoke at the convening about the Pawnee Seed Preservation Project and its efforts to perpetuate Native species associated with the Pawnee people. The program distributes seed stock to tribal members and works to establish cornfields in the current, historic, and ancestral territories of the Pawnee. A significant measure of their success was the re-establishment of Pawnee corn in their historic homelands in Nebraska. This initiative included the planting of corn in the proposed path of the Keystone XL pipeline. Echo-Hawk also spoke of the efforts of ancestral Pawnee people to protect the genetic integrity of various varieties through innovative farming techniques that are evidenced in the archaeological record.

Amos Hinton spoke of his previous efforts with the Ponca Nation in the [Mah-Zahn Farms](#) initiative to provide organic raised pork and heirloom vegetables to the elders nutrition program of the tribe. Hinton recently left the Ponca Nation to found a private, non-profit organization, Sovereign Foods, Inc., to promote the use of Native crops and organic husbandry in healthy diets for Native communities. Hinton succinctly summarized his current agenda, and obvious passion, as a “strong desire and commitment to grow Native farms.”

The keynote speaker was Joy Hought, Research and Education Program Manager at [Native Seeds/SEARCH](#) (NS/S), a Tucson based non-profit organization dedicated to seed diversity and conservation. The organization has over thirty years of experience in collaborative research and applied programming with the indigenous communities of the American Southwest and northern Mexico. Hought provided a general overview of the mission and evolving programs of NS/S. Of particular interest to this audience was her overview of the seed archiving system in place at NS/S. Although the organization remains focused on the Southwest region, they are able to offer

seed archive services for heirloom species and access to the Native American Bulk Seed Exchange Program.

Audience discussion following the presentations focused on a range of topics and issues, with an emphasis on the impact of GMO's on heirloom varieties and the pedigree and provenance of the heritage seed stock provided by the USDA.

Following lunch and continued dialogue, the workshop continued with tours of the [Robert Bebb Herbarium](#), University of Oklahoma, and a presentation at the [Oklahoma Biological Survey](#). The tour of the herbarium was led by its Curator, Wayne Elisens, and focused on the topic of voucher specimens and highlighted the archiving services of the herbarium. The workshop concluded with a presentation by Bruce Hoagland, Professor and Heritage Biologist, on the resources and programs of the Survey, focusing on the database of [Oklahoma Vascular Plants](#). Hoagland coordinates the [Oklahoma Natural Heritage Survey](#) and spoke of the criteria used to qualify plants as endangered, threatened, or rare in the formal classification systems of the federal and state governments.

The high interest and attendance expressed at the workshop demonstrated the current importance of botany projects in the contemporary Native communities of Oklahoma. This interest, in our opinion, moves ethnobotany beyond its traditional domains to embrace the contemporary issues of sovereignty, wellness, land rights, and economic development. It is the intent of the museum to host similar gatherings to promote greater awareness of tribal initiatives and to foster opportunities for inter-organizational collaborations.

Note

1. The Sam Noble Museum is a multidisciplinary museum of natural history on the campus of the University of Oklahoma in Norman. The museum includes three units of anthropological relevance—the Department of Archaeology, the Department of Native American Languages, and the Department of Ethnology, for which the first author is Curator.

*Daniel C. Swan is Curator of Ethnology at the Sam Noble Museum and a Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma. He is the author of several studies of Native American ethnobotany and material culture study, including *Peyote Religious Art: Symbols of Faith and Belief* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999).*

*Paul Minnis is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma. He is the author and editor of a diverse range of studies in the field of Native American ethnobotany including, most recently, the second edition of *New Lives for Ancient and Extinct Crops* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014)*

Figure 1

Left to Right: Daniel C. Swan, Pat Gwin, Joy Hought, Deborah Echo-Hawk (front), Amos Hinton, Gordon Yellowman, Trevor Blythe, and Paul Minnis.

Figure 2

Curator Wayne Elisens leads a tour of the Bebb Herbarium at the University of Oklahoma. Julia Jordan discusses the voucher samples that she placed in the herbarium during her research to document Apache ethnobotany.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14434/mar.v8i2.13045>