

***The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation.* David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, eds.. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2006. 364 pp.¹**

Reviewed by Linda S. Cordell

On June 8, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt signed into law an “Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities.” This legislation is fundamental to American historic and natural resource preservation and is of singular importance to American archaeology and museum anthropology. The Antiquities Act of 1906 makes it illegal to damage and loot archaeological sites on federal land, mandating penalties for those convicted of such activities. The act requires that institutions engaged in examining ruins and excavating archaeological sites on federal land be reputable museums, universities, and other recognized scientific institutions and that they obtain permits for their work. The act specifies that these studies and “gatherings” of antiquities be undertaken for the purpose of increasing knowledge rather than for sale or exhibition of objects. The act states that objects obtained through authorized scientific studies be preserved permanently in public museums. Finally, the Antiquities Act gives the president the power to designate as national monuments, historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other places of historic or scientific interest on lands owned by the federal government.

The Antiquities Act, A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation, edited by David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, marks the centennial anniversary of the Antiquities Act of 1906. Harmon is executive director of the George Wright Society, an organization of resource managers. McManamon is chief archaeologist for the National Park Service, and Pitcaithley recently retired as chief historian for the National Park Service. Seventeen additional contributors include Cecil D. Andrus, former secretary of the Department of Interior; Dennis Curtis, manager of Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument; Darla Sidles, superintendent of Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument; Elena Daly, director of the Bureau of Land Management’s National Landscape Conservation System; Mark Squillace, director of the Natural Resources Law Center at the University of Colorado, and historians Char Miller and Hal Rothman who have particular expertise in the history of environmental conservation and national parks. The editors and contributors offer personal and professional insights into specific historic milestones, decisions and controversies that underlie the current status of our system of federal land management and heritage conservation.

The book opens with an introduction by the editors and contains 16 brief chapters organized in five parts. Part 1 describes the history of the Antiquities Act and includes the useful chapter by Ronald F. Lee, first published in 1970, reprinted in 2000, and now available electronically, on the origins of the Act.¹ Part 2 consists of four chapters about expanded, innovative, and controversial, presidential use of the Act such as the dispute over Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and President Jimmy Carter’s Alaskan monuments. The final chapter in Part 2, by James R. Rasband, is a philosophical plea for obtaining local community involvement proactively prior to

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monument designation. Chapters in Part 3 reflect on the influence of the Act on the culture of historic and environmental preservation in the U.S. In Part 4, chapters focus on creative implementation and expansion of the Act. For example, they discuss monuments that are co-managed by two federal agencies and monuments that consist of ocean environments. The editors provide a retrospective assessment as the single chapter in Part 5. A useful appendix of “essential facts and figures” about national monuments, a bibliography, notes about the contributors and index complete the book.

Readers of this journal are likely to be anthropologists, archaeologists, and museum professionals for whom the provisions of the Antiquities Act entail special concerns and responsibilities. In our professional lives, we are stewards of our national legacy and must guard that legacy despite competing demands on our time, inadequate funding, and other threats. As anthropologists we are sensitive to and respect the concerns and wishes of descendant peoples for whom there is appreciation of landscapes, archaeological sites, and objects of antiquity for spiritual and cultural values not reflected in their having been designated as national monuments or objects of scientific interest. In this book, archaeology and museum anthropology are represented by Raymond Harris Thompson, Mesoamerican archaeologist and former Director of the Arizona State Museum. Thompson provides a well-researched and thoughtful discussion of Edgar Lee Hewett’s role in drafting the Antiquities Act and the politics involved in shepherding its passage. Useful though it is, Thompson’s historical chapter does not give us his perspective about museum-related issues such as the challenges posed by providing repositories for antiquities in perpetuity or adequately curating the vast archaeological collections that are legacies of the Act.

In this volume, in addition to McMananon, archaeology is represented by Joe E. Watkins. Watkins writes thoughtfully about the historical anthropological context within which the Antiquities Act was drafted, the era of “salvage ethnology” when American Indian culture was assumed to be disappearing. Watkins examines the consequences of treating American Indians as objects of scientific study and of transferring the American Indian past to the domain of the American public without consulting American Indians themselves. Watkins ends on an optimistic note, largely by moving his discussion forward to include more recent legislation requiring consultation with American Indian tribes.

As this review is being written, *The Antiquities Act, A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation* is the only available book-length treatment on the centennial of the Act. The volume therefore serves an important function as a resource for those who want to learn about the Antiquities Act, how it came about, how it has been used, and what it means in our world today. For archaeologists and museum anthropologists, the history of the Act and subsequent legislation will be relatively familiar. I suspect the same archaeologists and museum anthropologists will find that, with the exception of Watkins’s chapter, there is somewhat less than they would like in this volume that offers insight or guidance into the current challenges we face in caring for, studying, learning from, conserving, and respecting the irreplaceable resources of the past.

Note

1. See *The Antiquities Act of 1906*. Ronald F. Lee, National Park Service, Office of History and Historic Architecture, Eastern Service Center, 1970, "The Antiquities Act of 1906," Ronald F. Lee, *Journal of the Southwest*, 2000, 42(2):198-269 and The Story of the Antiquities Act of 1906, Electronic document, www.cr.nps.gov/aad/PUBS/LEE/index.htm, accessed April 18, 2007.

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