

NEWSLETTER

ESA HISTORICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE

(ESTABLISHED 1944)

*Resources for the history of the Ecological Society of America
and the history of ecology and allied sciences*

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A Welcome Update from the University of Georgia Archives

We are pleased to announce that with the assistance of Steven Armour at the University of Georgia's Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, a URL has been created with the finding aid for the Administrative Records of ESA: <http://hmfa.libs.uga.edu/hmfa/view?docId=ead/UA97-061-ead.xml>

This finding aid only represents a portion of the collection. Additions to the box and folder listing are forthcoming. We are grateful to have even an incomplete finding aid available for researchers. Many thanks to Steven and also to E. Gilbert Head, curator of the ESA collection.

A New Policy for Obituaries and Resolutions of Respect

ESA's Governing Board agreed to a proposal from Dennis Knight that would eliminate the past distinction between Obituaries and Resolutions of Respect. As discussed in the July 2015 issue of ESA's *Bulletin* (<http://www.esajournals.org/doi/full/10.1890/0012-9623-96.3.424>)

the new policy eliminates the category of "obituary" and instead proposes substituting Resolutions of Respect to honor deceased members of ESA. See the Bulletin announcement for guidelines.

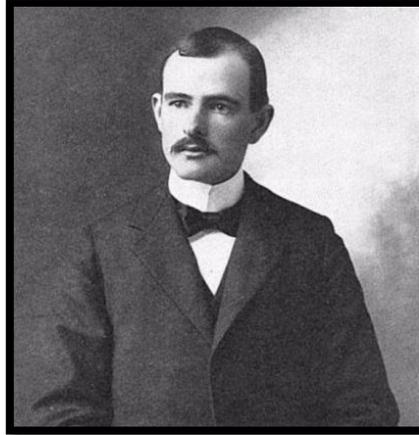
Preserving Field Books, Photographs and Maps Helps Scientists and Historians Alike

At HRC's workshop, held right before the Centennial meeting in Baltimore on August 8, Terry Wheeler led us through a fascinating discussion of modern ecological projects that build on natural history records going back more than a century. Such projects are often best administered by research museums and are important for conservation biology. Scientists today can make good use of notebooks, photographs and related materials that chart which species occupied given habitats decades ago. HRC

is interested in knowing about such projects, with the idea that we can link to these websites from our own website. If any historical projects are directly connected to ESA members, links can be made from our ESA member biographies.

Terry's discussion raised the broader question of what kinds of historical records should be candidates for preservation and how to link preservation efforts that may be occurring in different departments within institutions such as museums.

Terry showed us a couple of noteworthy examples of efforts to preserve and use old scientific data. At the Berkeley Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ), for instance, an NSF grant awarded in 2007 enabled Museum staff to do a resurvey of animal populations that had been studied by pioneer ecologist Joseph Grinnell and his colleagues. Grinnell (at right) was the first Director of the MVZ. The Grinnell Resurvey Project website can be found here:



<http://mvz.berkeley.edu/Grinnell/index.html>

Over several years Grinnell and colleagues surveyed mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians across California and in several adjoining states. That survey is being redone in order to gain information about changes in species distributions, habitat, and communities a century later. Grinnell was far-sighted in believing that the information he collected would be of use to future generations. The preservation of historical field notebooks, photographs, and specimens turned out to be important for later ecological assessments.

Terry noted that this type of project is essential not only for monitoring long-term change, but it also helps to get at questions about how science was done in the past. Indeed, resurvey projects of this kind are best done in tandem with archival projects that help to make hidden materials available. This is exactly what the MVZ has been doing. In 2012 it was awarded a grant from the Council for Library and Information Resources to make accessible its archive of fieldnotes, correspondence, annotated maps, images and artwork. Visit the MVZ blog to keep abreast of this exciting project:

<https://mvzarchives.wordpress.com/>

Terry's second example was the Smithsonian Institution's Field Book Project, which can be found here: <http://www.mnh.si.edu/rc/fieldbooks/>

This project, involving partnerships within and beyond the Smithsonian, involves digitizing information from field notebooks from all over the world to help us understand how biodiversity has changed over time and space. The partnerships link the Smithsonian to other initiatives such as the Biodiversity Heritage Library, university libraries and archives, botanical gardens, and academies of science. As well as documenting information about species, habitats,

and weather, the notebooks also contain personal observations and even "emotional declarations" from natural historians. As explained on the website, the goal of the project is to make fieldbooks easier to find and available in digital format for current research, as well as "inspiring new ways of utilizing these rich information resources."

Committee members pondered what other projects on more recent ecologists could be started with the right institutional backing. For instance, Ruth Patrick (below) left important collections at Drexel University's Academy of Natural Sciences.



Ruth Patrick (1907-2013). Photo source: <http://www.ansp.org/research/environmental-research/people/patrick/>

These might be suited to a modern project that could combine cataloguing of traditional archival materials with preservation of notebooks and scientific data that would be important to future scientists as well as to historians.

Projects such as these also relate to HRC's interests in assembling and making available data on the first cohort of ESA members. This ongoing project led by Julie Mulroy (as described in the July Newsletter), is seeking someone with the expertise to create a relational database that will, over time, serve as a rich resource for information on individual ecologists and early ESA members. Collections of notebooks, maps, and images can be included in such a database.

In addition to these kinds of projects, we note that some early ecologists have left photograph collections which may be of interest to those researching the history of ecologists and of ESA, as well as to scientists interested in changes in vegetation and landscape over the past century. For example Homer L. Shantz (ESA President, 1928) left a photograph collection at the University of Arizona that includes historical photographs from the Smithsonian African Expedition (1919-1920) and the 1913 International Phytogeography Expedition, among other things. Shantz was interested in documenting vegetation change through photography, but he also took pictures of people, towns, and landscapes (at right, his photo of wildflower sellers in South Africa, 1919). Some photographs have been digitized and can be found at this website of the University of Arizona archives:

<http://uair.library.arizona.edu/item/274074>



A pioneering ecological study of Arizona's vegetation that used historical photographs was J. R. Hastings and R. M. Turner, *The Changing Mile: An Ecological Study of Vegetation Change with Time in the Lower Mile of an Arid and Semiarid Region of Arizona* (1965). This study used photographs taken between 1883 and 1916, many by botanists working at the Desert Botanical Laboratory outside Tucson, and rephotographed the original sites to study changes in vegetation. In the 1965 study not all the historical photographs were used, hence the authors revised their study by rephotographing all 300 of the original sites. See R. M. Turner, R. H. Webb, J. E. Bowers, and J. R. Hastings, *The Changing Mile Revisited* (2003).

The HRC Newsletter is a quarterly publication and welcomes contributions from HRC members and friends. Please send Newsletter items at any time to Sharon Kingsland at

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