

HPSfAA: Celebrating 20 Years. The Omer C. Stewart Memorial Award¹

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Introduction

When our President, Howard Stein, notified me that I had been selected as the recipient of the Omer Stewart award, I told him that I would accept it as fanfare for the common man/woman/member of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology. I say this because the success of our organization is a result of the selfless efforts of many in our "community" who may never receive recognition or an award. I applaud all of you who have worked diligently to maintain our organizational culture with its unique mission, rites, rituals, and values. I applaud all of you who have served on the board and the standing committees; special recognition for those who organized 20 years of annual meetings; special recognition for those who served as editors of our journal and newsletters. For all of you, I accept the Omer Stewart award.

For the past 20 years, I have worked as consulting anthropologist and grant writer for many public and private organizations, primarily in project development. My clients have included the Colorado Migrant Health Program, the Piton Foundation's Task Force on the Medically Indigent, the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division, the Division of Criminal Justice, the Denver Police Department, the Denver District Attorney's Office, and myriad non-profit organizations. My experience with organizations coupled with the occasion of High Plains' 20th anniversary prompted me to search for a framework to reflect on our history, to gauge our health as an organization, and look at the strengths which will take us into the new millennium.

Organizational Life Cycle

There are various ways to look at organizations. The model which I am going to apply to High Plains focuses on the natural life cycle of organizations

(Adizes 1988). Like humans, organizations can be portrayed as having a birth, infancy, adolescence, prime, and decline. Each stage is characterized by specific attributes or characteristics. Birth takes place when commitment is successfully tested and the organizers take the risk. The process is one of excitement, enthusiasm, and energy as opposed to decline, the final stage when no one is willing or able to make the commitment. Adizes postulates that building commitment is the key to success. Without commitment, the organization may break up at the first signs of rough times. In adolescence, the organization undergoes a rebirth as the founders step back and allow others to make decisions. There may be conflict, with loss of mutual respect and trust as the organization temporarily loses its vision.

Surviving adolescence, the organization reaches prime, characterized by functional systems and organizational structure; institutionalized vision and creativity; and results orientation. In prime, the organization makes plans and then follows up on those plans; the organization excels in performance; the organization can afford to grow; the organization may spin off new infant organizations. The challenge for a mature organization is to continue in its prime and counteract signs of aging. Adizes says that early signs of aging include adherence to precedence, a reliance on what has worked in the past, a loss of flexibility and creativity. There may be lower expectations for growth and reluctance to initiate change. The focus may be on past achievements rather than on a vision for the future. Some are saying that High Plains has been an interesting 20 year experiment, that we are becoming complacent, maybe a little tired. Is our demise imminent? Is revitalization possible? On this occasion of celebration, let's take stock of where we have been and the strengths which have sustained us.

Our Birth and Infancy

The birth of the High Plains Society can be attributed directly to the efforts of four individuals: Deward E. Walker Jr., Friedl Lang, Omer C. Stewart, and Michael Higgins. The Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) had established regional committees to study the feasibility of certifying applied anthropology programs and practicing anthropologists. The High Plains group met for over a year prior to submitting a report at SfAA's business meeting in Philadelphia in March 1979. The regional committees concurred that accreditation of programs and individuals was premature and probably not desirable. Of greater interest was the formation of regional societies of SfAA. In March 1980, at the SfAA annual meeting in Denver, the High Plains committee conducted an organizational meeting at which the participants voted to formalize the High Plains Regional Section of SfAA and elected pro tem officers. The pro tem officers were: president, Deward Walker; co-secretaries and newsletter co-editors, Julie Uhlmann and Peter Van Arsdale. Bus Lahren chaired the by-laws committee; Michael Higgins chaired the committee charged to organize the first annual meeting to be held in Boulder on February 20-22, 1981 at the Hilton Harvest House Hotel. In the fall of 1980, Deward Walker sent out an announcement of the new organization and the upcoming annual meeting. He stated that the meeting's "main purpose will be both the formal and informal interchange of current information among High Plains applied anthropologists as well as further organizational and sub-committee planning." A call for papers and volunteers appeared in the announcement.

The first annual meeting crackled with all the excitement of beholding a newborn infant. Harland Padfield, President-elect of SfAA, gave the keynote address titled, "Regional Development: A Critical View." Anthropologists from throughout the region inspired the attendees with accounts of their activities which were summarized in the first High Plains Newsletter published in the fall of 1981. The first general election was held and the following officers were elected: chairperson: Friedl Lang, chairperson-elect: Shirley Kurz Jones, and secretary-treasurer: myself, at that time a graduate student at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Our Adolescence

The growth of the High Plains Society into an independent organization began its awkward adolescent period in late 1983 when we learned from SfAA that we could not pursue incorporation and still be a regional section of SfAA. The same IRS regulations which prevented SfAA from continuing its relationship with AAA also applied to High Plains and our relationship with SfAA. President Reed Riner guided us through the growing pains by communicating with SfAA, brokering an affiliation agreement between the two organizations, and providing leadership for the changes in our Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Name. Reed led a discussion on "The Future of HPRS" at our annual meeting in 1984. Among questions related to a new name, reorganization, changes in bylaws, purpose, and direction, we queried whether we had the critical mass, the collective numbers, the commitment and opportunity for interaction sufficient for independent success (Knop, 1984). We almost formalized our name as the High Plains Regional Society for Applied Anthropology. However, at a meeting of the executive committee in late 1984 or early 1985 to finalize the "Amended and Restated Articles of Incorporation," Larry Van Horn looked at the name and queried why we needed the word "Regional." With a stroke of the future journal editor's pen, we became the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology.

As a young organization, we needed to define the services we could offer our members. Everyone agreed that an annual meeting was essential, as evidenced by the member turnout and level of participation. Members wanted the opportunity to share and renew. However, the character of our annual meetings gradually changed between 1981 and 1985. Initially we modeled our format after the national anthropology societies and convened at hotels in Boulder and Denver where we sat in rows and listened to formal papers which were published as highlights or proceedings. By the third year, the members were asking for more opportunity for informal discussion and interaction. In 1984, Ken Keller, at Metropolitan State College, invited us to meet at the Auraria Higher Education Center in Denver. Ted Downing, President-elect of SfAA, presented the keynote address, "Human Rights and the Future of Anthropology." We looked at the rights of migrant farmworkers, transsexuals, refugees in Mexico, abused children,

Native Americans, and learned about international human rights law. The Anthropology Department hosted a convivial wine and cheese party at their quaint, historic district house on the campus. We never missed the Hiltons and Holiday Inns!

Our Prime

As we searched for a more permanent home for our annual meetings, Board Member Arthur Campa suggested the Bethlehem Center, a rural retreat center in Broomfield. We met there for the first time in 1985 (and for the next seven years) and celebrated our identity as an autonomous organization with over 100 members. The Bethlehem Center provided the inexpensive, relaxed atmosphere for a “come-as-you-are” party at which we renewed friendships, applauded what our colleagues were doing throughout the region, and welcomed new members. The following year, 1986, we co-sponsored the SfAA Annual Meeting in Reno, Nevada, organized at least two sessions, and attained national recognition.

We established another essential service for our members as early as October 1981. This was the Newsletter of the High Plains Regional Section under the direction of Editor, Peter Van Arsdale. The first issue (1981) had an Introductory letter from Friedl Lang, Chairperson, in which he summarized our origins and our purpose, and defined “practicing anthropologists,” the group we wanted to reach, in the broadest sense. Friedl said, “By practicing anthropologists, we mean not only those who have academic degrees in anthropology (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.), but all those who, no matter what their disciplinary and academic background may have been, find the anthropological approach of help in solving the technical, environmental, organizational, and other human problems they must deal with in their work. That is, they see their work as being part of a cultural matrix or context; they see problems to be solved in a systemic and holistic manner, sometimes of a cross-cultural nature. These practicing anthropologists are concerned about the social consequences of their actions and the programs they work with. They subscribe to the “Statement on Professional and Ethical Responsibilities of the SfAA” as published in *Human Organization*. Later we would incorporate Friedl’s insights into our *Fact Sheet* to promote our organization.

Under Peter Van Arsdale’s leadership, the Newsletter grew in quality, size, and frequency. In addition to news, Peter began to include short articles. In 1983 the Newsletter grew into a Bulletin with longer, refereed articles. Ed Knop followed Peter as editor and changed the name to *High Plains Applied Anthropologist*. In the summer 1984 issue, Ed included a member survey developed by the Communications Committee, asking for member input on the content of the Bulletin, its format and frequency, and the general direction of the organization. In the fall of 1984 the Executive Committee held a retreat at the Broken Arrow Ranch, 30 miles west of Boulder, and invited all interested members to join them to look at “the direction of anthropology today and what that means for greater HPRS relevance and effectiveness,” including the Bulletin. It was a follow-up to discussions begun at the Spring Annual Meeting to orchestrate our transition to autonomy. While I can’t recall any specifics of our discussions at the retreat, I will forever remember the look on Ken Keller’s face when I told him that the 20 fish caught by him and his family on the private pond would be assessed \$.10 per inch by the Broken Arrow Ranch.

Larry Van Horn succeeded Peter as editor of the journal in 1987. Within two or three years, the Newsletter was reinitiated to handle the internal communications of the organization. Arthur Campa has served as Editor of the Newsletter for over a decade, probably a record for perseverance. For the journal, Larry Van Horn initiated a “handy size” which continued through Larry’s tenure as editor. We were all relieved that the duct tape binding endured only for two issues! Susan Scott-Stevens became editor in 1993, followed in 1996 by Deward Walker who, now in his second term as editor, personally subsidizes journal expenses.

Throughout its existence, the journal has maintained the highest standards of journalism and provides a valuable repository of information about HPSfAA. Its domain is no longer restricted to our region’s applied anthropology interests and affairs (Knop 1984). The latest mission statement of the journal states that its “focus is on cultural change and adaptation in the modern world.” The Publications Policy Committee is now pondering such issues as: 1) publishing a monograph series to highlight journal articles on different topics, 2) finding a publisher to underwrite journal expenses and, 3) increasing our

institutional and individual memberships to augment our revenues. Ed Knop asked the question in 1984, what can we do with what we can afford? In 2000 the question has been rephrased to read, how can we find a way to provide funding for what we want to do? But this is a question for Sunday's session on the future.

What about other member services? Innovations during our infancy and adolescence included proceedings of our annual meetings in 1982 and 1983, thanks to the efforts of Larry Van Horn and Peter Van Arsdale. In 1985 and 1988 we had the luxury of member directories produced by Lin Evans with a comprehensive index of geographical areas of interest. Filled with youthful exuberance and energy, we developed creative events in the 1980s and 1990s to offer the members opportunities for socializing. We organized a series of annual holiday parties/fund raisers held in January at Friedl's home in Boulder, at the faculty house at the University of Denver, at a local church hall in Denver, and at the Anthropology Department house on the Auraria campus. About the same time, we tried a summer picnic which was not well attended, even though I tried to entice members to my home with the promise of free perennials. Anne Bolin managed to get about 10 of us organized to run in the Boulder Bolder five (or was it 10 or 20?) kilometer race in the late 1980s. We partied before and after, and a grand time was had by all. I don't think anyone placed in the first 1000 to cross the finish line! In 1993 I organized a group of 20 members and families to attend the Aztec Exhibit at the Museum of Natural History. We held it in conjunction with the Holiday Party, and it was well received.

Unlike other local anthropology organizations, e.g., the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists (WAPA), we never entertained the idea of having monthly meetings. As a regional organization, our members were too far flung to participate on a regular basis. However, the notion of a fall retreat came up again in 1991-92 during my presidency. Because the annual meeting was held in the Boulder-Denver area, we thought a fall meeting in the southwest would strengthen our ties with members outside of Colorado. Mary Granica had been to Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico, and highly recommended it. In 1992 we met there for the first time, fell in love with the splendid landscape, and have returned annually for the fall ritual of community discussions, sharing, and support.

Maintaining Prime

During our life span of 20 years, several other local and regional applied anthropology organizations have experienced birth, infancy, adolescence, and prime, as well as decline. I am acutely aware of this as the SfAA-LPO Liaison and through my attempts to keep track of local practitioner organizations (LPOs) throughout the country. At one time, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were about 15 local and regional anthropology organizations throughout the country. I am now aware of nine active ones; four of these have fewer than 10 active members. Seven (46%) of the earlier list are either dormant or non-existent.

What are the strengths that have sustained High Plains? I have compiled ten. There are more.

1. Healthy mix of practitioners and academics. Over seven academic programs are currently represented among our members: University of Colorado, Colorado State University, University of Northern Colorado, Metropolitan State College, Northern Arizona University, University of Arizona, and University of Nebraska, Lincoln, to name a few.
2. Mutidisciplinary diversity. We welcome sociologists, environmentalists, human service providers, and others who fit Friedl Lang's concept of membership, i.e., anyone who applies the anthropological, cultural, and ethnographic approach in their work.
3. Steady inflow and enthusiastic acceptance of students. HPSfAA has always welcomed students as full-fledged members. In 1998 a student representative was officially added as a voting member of the Board of Directors.
4. Large enough geographical area to support a critical mass of members. Since our organizational meeting in 1980, High Plains has averaged about 80 members annually, with periodic dips and swells.
5. A relatively large core of committed members who have consistently taken on responsibilities and roles of leadership when called upon. The latter is significant because we have not experienced the deadly phenomenon of one or two persons grappling for power and not allowing the organization to grow beyond their vision.

6. Strong administrative structure. Our bylaws were originally based on those of SfAA and have undergone two revisions to reflect changes in the organization, the most recent in 1998.
7. Fiscal responsibility. The treasurers have consistently carried out their roles effectively. We are also a 501(c)(3) tax exempt corporation (achieved in 1988) which makes us eligible for donations, foundation grants, and other benefits.
8. Mutually supportive relationships with the two national applied anthropology organizations: SfAA and NAPA. Several members of High Plains have honed their leadership skills in our organization before going on to serve as officers in the national organizations, becoming liaisons and good will ambassadors.
9. A nationally recognized journal. No other regional or local anthropology organization has accomplished this. I discussed the impact of the journal on our members and the profession with three former editors. Ed Knop spoke about the journal's role in instilling professionalism: we are a group to be taken seriously; our members can communicate their research and activism and have their roles legitimized and reinforced in the process. Larry Van Horn believes that our journal promotes a sense of community for our grassroots organization, but Larry admits disappointment with the lack of dialog. Deward Walker recognizes the quality of articles in the journal and sees rich material for monographs and readings that can be used in classes and workshops.
10. Tradition of annual meetings and retreats. These are our life blood, the settings where we get renewed, share ideas, and confirm our commitment, vision, and community.

Return for a moment to the Bethlehem Center, ten years ago on April 21, 1990, when we celebrated our 10th anniversary with the planting of a tree. Listen to Jaimie Alexander's (1990) account of the event and feel the communion, if not the spiritualism which bonded us:

...the late afternoon sun shone upon a group of anthropologists, members of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology (HPSfAA),

gathered on the lawn of the Bethlehem Conference Center near Northglenn, Colorado, north of Denver. Among them were two of the founding members— Omer Stewart and Deward Walker. Amidst a light breeze, High Plains President Art Campa and Deward Walker carefully placed a young cottonwood tree into a shallow hole that had been specially prepared and watered to receive it.

Life Member Omer Stewart shoveled the first earth around the tree and then chanted a Ute peyote song. Deward Walker cast a cornmeal blessing to the east, to the south, to the west, to the north, to the sky, and to Mother Earth. Emilia González-Clements quietly intoned the Quechua term for Mother Earth, *Pachamama*, and I uttered a Nahuatl phrase asking the tree to show forth its beauty. One by one, members of the group approached the tree, scooped a handful of earth, and gently packed it around the tree. Father Anton Borer, our host and a brother of the Bethlehem Fathers who runs the conference center, donned his stole and softly blessed both the tree and the Society. The participants then left this special spot to return to the next session of the HPSfAA annual meeting.... Deward Walker, who donated the tree, had expressed the hope that as the tree grows sturdy and strong so will the Society.

Our tree is now ten years old and appears heading for prime, according to a recent photo taken by Deward. So where are we in our life cycle? Are we still in prime or are there signs of aging? Do we still have flexibility and creativity? Do we have the desire and energy to attract new members? Can we handle change? Where do we go from here? We laid the foundation for strategic planning in Ghost Ranch in 1992 when Peter Van Arsdale helped us develop vision, mission, and goal statements. Emilia Gonzalez-Clements took us another step forward in 1995 with the Participatory Planning Project. She encouraged us to collect our historical documents and identify where we came from, where we have been. This is done. Now, where do we want to go? Are you ready to be a part of the next 20 years?

Notes

1. The 2000 Omer C. Stewart Memorial Award was presented at the annual meeting of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology in Estes Park, Colorado, on April 7, 2000.

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