

August 31, 2020

**KROEBER HALL:
WHAT'S IN AN IN-NAMING**

ADDENDUM

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This is an addendum to the memo that I submitted on July 15, 2020. It draws upon my research in the Hearst Museum's archaeological archives.

Some commentators on the Kroeber Hall un-naming debate have suggested that Alfred Kroeber had minimal interest in archaeology and did not participate in excavations of human remains in California; that the bulk of excavation of burials took place prior to 1909 before Kroeber took over administration of the department; and that the department and museum under Kroeber's leadership (1909-1946) reduced its involvement in digging up Native burial sites.¹

My research suggests a different assessment.

The department of anthropology was initially chaired by the Harvard anthropologist Frederic Putnam, whose ideas about physical anthropology and archaeology shaped the department's priorities from 1901 until his retirement in 1909. But Putnam retained his position at Harvard and was only occasionally in

¹ See, for example, memo from Kent Lightfoot to UC Berkeley Building Name Review Committee, July 22, 2020.

Berkeley. Kroeber became secretary and executive officer in 1903 and essentially ran the department in Putnam's absence. From 1909 until his retirement in 1946, Kroeber was in charge of both the department and museum.

As executive officer of the department from 1903 to 1909, Kroeber supervised excavations on the West Berkeley shellmound where, according to archaeologist Joseph Peterson, "there was an abundance of human remains"; investigations of burial sites along the Russian River; and an extensive survey of Bay Area shellmounds in 1907, in which exhumations figured prominently.

Beginning in 1909, as chair of the department and director of the museum, Kroeber oversaw excavations of Native burial sites almost every year, with the exception of during and after World War I.² Kroeber may not have been involved in the actual physical work of digging trenches and excavating Native human remains in California, but he visited sites; participated in debates about what could be learned from burials; and encouraged amateur archaeologists all over the state to dig up and send crania to the university. In 1911, he contacted the president of the California State Dental Association for help in analyzing teeth and jaws in the museum's collection. In 1921, he authorized payment of ten dollars for "the skull of an Indian" dug up in Kern County.³ Moreover, Kroeber used extensive data derived from

² Excavations took place in 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1935, 1936, 1937-8, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1946, and 1947.

³ I discuss details of Kroeber's involvement in curating Native human remains in *Grave Matters*, 89-93.

exhumations in his efforts to reconstruct how “people in ancient and more recent times lived their lives.”⁴

Kroeber recruited Edward Gifford to the department in 1912 and trained him to become his right-hand man specializing in physical archaeology. Gifford’s *California Anthropometry* (1926) followed in the eugenics tradition of Samuel Morton’s *Crania America* (1839) and Ales Hrdlicka’s *Directions for Collecting Information and Specimens for Physical Anthropology* (1904). Gifford’s measurement of brain cavities, nostrils, and degree of slope in foreheads generated all kinds of essentialist scientific quackery to justify the civilizational superiority of white Europeans and innate inferiority of Native peoples. “The lips of the California Indians,” he wrote in 1926, “may be characterized as medium in thickness, occupying in this respect a position halfway between the lips of whites and of Negroes.”⁵ In his major anthropometric work, Gifford thanked Kroeber for providing research data and “for his unflagging willingness to discuss the problems which these materials suggested.”

As a founding member of the Society for American Archaeology, Kroeber retained a “strong interest in archaeology.” According to an authoritative obituary, “in spite of the fact that they informed only a part of his total scholarly work, Kroeber’s contributions to archaeology are more substantial and important than those of most men who have devoted their entire career to the subject.”⁶

⁴ A. L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Smithsonian Institution, 1925, v.

⁵ E. W. Gifford, “California Indian Types,” *Natural History*, 26, 1926, 50-60.

⁶ John Howland Rowe, “Alfred Louis Kroeber, 1876-1960,” *American Antiquity* 27, 3, January 1962, 395-415.

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