Teachers' Geography Institute to Emphasize Role of the Railroads

A Teachers' Summer Institute based on the theme of Geography, Transportation, and the Shaping of the Greater Southwest: A New Look at the Region's Railroads will be held June 1-10, 1994.

The eight day institute at UTA will offer 30 area teachers (K-12) new insights into how the geography and economy of our region—the Greater Southwest—has been shaped by transportation. Using examples from Texas and other parts of the region, the institute describes the crucial role of the railroad in relation to the five themes of geography as identified by the National Geographic Society (location, place, human-environment interaction, movement, regions). Students of Southwestern history know that the railroads had, and continue to have, a tremendous impact on the region’s development, environment, and resources. The railroads helped shape popular images of the region through their promotional publicity. Having helped shape our region’s cities and basic interurban and communication/management systems in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, railroads have survived major challenges by other modes of transport (notably highway and airlines). Today railroad transportation is experiencing a renaissance as computerized signaling and dispatching technology, inter-modal transport concepts, and sophisticated high-speed rail systems, often called “Super Trains,” are adopted.

According to Dr. Richard Francaviglia, Center Director, “the railroads and UTA will be partners in a unique educational opportunity for the teachers.” Morning sessions focusing on content will be followed by afternoon workshops designed and taught by a team of two teacher consultants. The teachers will be asked to prepare lesson plans based on their instruction and experiences in this Institute. Field trips (Dallas/Fort Worth rail facilities; Age of Steam Railroad Museum and Union Station in Dallas; Fort Worth & Western steam train ride; Amtrak trip from Dallas to Fort Worth with Amtrak representatives) will highlight the institute. Teacher participants will be awarded three (3) semester hours of graduate credit for the institute.

Partial funding for the institute is being provided by the region's railroads, including Union Pacific, Santa Fe, and Burlington Northern. Registration will be limited, and teachers are advised to apply early. For additional information, and a detailed program of activities for the Geography Institute, contact Dr. Richard Francaviglia, Director, Center for Greater Southwestern Studies and the History of Cartography, Box 19497, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas 76019-0497, (817) 273-3000, ext. 4931.
Experiencing Navajo Nightway Ceremonies in Arizona and New Mexico

One of the immense joys of studying oral literatures is that, if you are lucky, you will see the words you love performed. My love for the Navajo Nightway (kletze hatal or tl'eeri hatal) began more than 20 years ago as I hunted for Navajo material for my first course in American Indian literatures.

Over the years, I became fascinated, overwhelmed might be a better word, by the complexity of this nine-day healing ceremony (or “sing”) that calls down Navajo Holy People to reestablish balance and harmony (hózhó) in one or more patients (the “ones sung over”). According to tradition, the patients had consciously or inadvertently disrupted natural or social orders. The results of this imbalance for Nightway patients are typically manifested in various head illnesses (eyes, ears, mental problems) or paralysis. Nightways (also called Night Chants and Yeibichei Dances, referring to the Holy People who dance, especially during the last night) include hundreds of songs, thousands of chanted lines and rituals, dances, and the creation of several large sandpaintings. Skilled singers (medicine men) who possess elaborate medicine bundles direct assistants, patients, and dancers. Parts of the Nightway occur inside the ceremonial hogans; others occur outside, including the all-night dancing and singing of the last night that may be witnessed by hundreds of people.

The complexity fascinated me. The beauty of the words, even in translation, moved me. Here is an excerpt from one of the long prayers spoken by the singer and patient(s) to the first dancers to perform on the last night. The lines combine the sacredness of a religious invocation with the power of Whitemanesque cadences:

Oh, male divinity! 
With your mocassins of dark cloud, come to us. 
With your leggings of dark cloud, come to us. 
With your shirt of dark cloud, come to us. 
With your headress of dark cloud, come to us. 
With your mind enveloped in dark cloud, come to us. 
With the dark thunder above you, come to us soaring. 
With the shapen cloud at your feet, come to us soaring.

With the far darkness made of the dark cloud over your head, come to us soaring.
With the far darkness made of the he-rain over your head, come to us soaring.
With the far darkness made of the dark mist over your head, come to us soaring.
With the far darkness made of the she-rain over your head, come to us soaring.
With the zigzag lightning flung out on high over your head, come to us soaring.
With the rainbow hanging high over your head, come to us soaring.

With the far darkness made of the dark cloud on the ends of your wings, come to us soaring.
With the far darkness made of the he-rain on the ends of your wings, come to us soaring.
With the far darkness made of the dark mist on the ends of your wings, come to us soaring.
With the far darkness made of the she-rain on the ends of your wings, come to us soaring.
With the zigzag lightning flung out on high on the ends of your wings, come to us soaring.
With the rainbow hanging high on the ends of your wings, come to us soaring.
With the near darkness made of the dark cloud, of the he-rain, of the dark mist, and of the she-rain, come to us.

With the darkness on the earth, come to us.

(from Matthews, Navajo Legends, 273; for a bilingual translation, see 269-70)

Ever since my first encounter with translations of parts of the Nightway, I had longed to see this chantway performed. I knew that would be difficult. Nightways are not (outsider) drop-in affairs; announcement of scheduling times is typically carried by local voices, not by printed pages (though impromptu “Yeibichei Dance” signs pointing down dirt roads do sometimes give some advance notice); and Nightways are performed during the fall and very early winter when I teach classes at UTA. Luckily, a fortuitous coming together of people and circumstances enabled me to fulfill my wish: I had saved some travel money; UTA’s Southwestern Studies Center provided a travel grant; my students were enthusiastically willing to miss a class; and, most important, a Navajo poet and friend, Luci Tapahonso, put me in touch with Will Tsosie, who runs a “hospitality
hogan” near Canyon de Chelly in Northeastern Arizona. He could take me to some of the public portions of Nightways held in mid-October of 1993.

I was excited and nervous. The map Will sent directed me to a tiny convenience store in a town not listed on my AAA map. I was to call from the store and be guided down a dirt road to my hospitality hogan. Actually, I had little to fear. One of Will’s aunts responded promptly to my call. Later Will appeared. By day he is a computer education specialist. His father is a Blessingway singer; his uncle has led numerous Nightways. Will has sung and danced at many Nightways, attended “more than a hundred” of them, and was “sung over” during a 1988 Nightway. Luci Tapahonso had certainly put me in touch with a fine guide to transforming English translations into performing words.

Over the next two and a half days, Will’s talks and our visits to two Nightways greatly expanded my book knowledge of the chantway. I learned that besides the patient(s), there could be several subpatients who participated in parts of the Nightway to determine if this were the right chantway for them. (The initial decision to be sung over is guided by one or more trained Navajo diagnosticians.) I also learned that there was a practicing Nightway medicine man who was a woman. And I witnessed a well-known characteristic of Navajo life: continuity midst change. The central setting for the final night was identical to the setting sketched by Washington Matthews during the late 19th century (Night Chant, 142). The hogan faced east; the medicine man and patients stood in front of the door facing the first four dancers accompanied by Talking God (the Great Communicator). There were large fires lining both sides of a rectangular dance area that terminated with a small arbor. But Matthews would have been surprised by the rows of pickups lining the dance area, by the food stands, by the electric lights illuminating the dancers, and by the PA system used for announcements and to thank the many people who helped to put together this particular performance.

Most of all I learned that, at least in Northeastern Navajo land, there is still a strong commitment to this complex form of medical, psychological, religious, artistic, and social coming together. During my brief stay, at least four Nightways were either beginning or concluding in these Arizona-New Mexico borderlands. This represents tremendous commitments of time, money, and expertise.

All the information I gained will certainly alter the way I teach and write about the Nightway. But the vivid sight and sound impressions were the keys to transforming printed words into living performances. I’m sure the intensity of the experience enhanced its vividness. Will wasn’t able to attend the last night with me. Thick clouds and cold squalls threatened. I was the only non-Na va o among two hundred Navajo situated three miles down a dirt road attached to a small highway that was sixty miles from a major city (if Gallup can be called a major city). Again, I had little to fear. The rain never rose above intermittent sprinkle stages, and the Navajo either let me be or spoke kind and/or curious words of welcome. We watched all male and male and female Yeibichei dance groups periodically appearing from behind the arbor. Not long before dawn, the dancers returned to the arbor for the last time. I was startled as spectators from both sides of the dance area rushed after and along side them. Then I saw that they were blessing the dancers with corn pollen—deities, humans, and sprays of blessing joined for a momentary walk toward the lightening horizon.

That image will stay with me for a long time. It was the sounds of the songs that had the deepest effect, however. All night until just before dawn, either within the hogan or in the dance area, there were songs. As I drove back to Gallup and then on to Albuquerque, I could hear the songs riding on the winds rushing past the car. They came back again over the hum of the airport electrical system. I was moved and a bit frightened. I had never experienced such strong sound memories. They were almost physical presences.

By the time I was in the air headed back to Arlington, the songs had faded. I felt relieved, but I also missed their company. I don’t know if they will ever return as vividly. I do know, however, that my brief personal encounter with the Nightway did transform printed English words into powerfully felt images and memories that help me to understand why, after hundreds of years, traditional Navajo still cherish words that transform disorder and disharmony into beautifully balanced sights and sounds.


Kenneth Roemer is a Center Fellow and Professor of English at UTA. He received his English and American Civilization degrees from Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Roemer has written and/or edited three books about utopian literature and one on N. Scott Momaday’s The Way to Rainy Mountain. He is currently on the Board of Editors of American Literature and has recently accepted the editorship of the Native American Writers volume of the Dictionary of Literary Biography.
BOOK REVIEWS

New Books About the Southwestern Borderlands

*Life and Labor* provides an anthropology of working people in border communities.


*Border Crossings* offers fictionalized account of Villa’s raid into New Mexico.

In March 1916, during the height of revolutionary activities, Pancho Villa’s bandits raided the American border town of Columbus, New Mexico. When the smoke cleared, 16 Americans and dozens of Villistas lay dead. The raid sent shock waves to the nation’s capital, and led to Pershing’s fruitless pursuit into Mexico. *Border Crossings*, a novel by David Fleming, is set during the siege of Columbus. Its plot features two former Texas rangers pursuing Villistas who have kidnapped a young American woman, Mary Wells, and abducted her across the border into Mexico. Fleming’s story helps historians understand the fear that gripped the borderlands during this crucial time in the early 20th Century. *Border Crossings* is available from the Texas Christian University Press, Box 30776, Fort Worth, Texas 76129.

Urban Geography book interprets the character of Mexico’s border cities.

What makes Mexican border cities so distinctive? How does one describe and interpret their character as places? These questions are answered in *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality* by Daniel D. Arreola and James Curtis. The authors, two geographers, carefully describe the many border cities from Tijuana to Matamoros, then identify and analyze major factors which characterize them, including tourism and industry. *The Mexican Border Cities* is essential reading for students of the borderlands, and is available from the University of Arizona Press, 1230 N. Park Avenue, Suite 102, Tucson, Arizona 85719-4140 (phone [602] 621-1441).

New Visitor Center Proposed for San Antonio Missions

The National Park Service is planning a new visitor center for the San Antonio Missions National Historic Park. Currently media planners at the NPS Interpretive Design Center in Harpers Ferry, WV, are researching the story of the missions and are seeking graphics, artifacts, and information that would aid in interpreting the history of the missions. The exhibits will emphasize the mission period and the complex role played by the missions on the Spanish colonial frontier. An orientation film will complement the exhibits and personal services by briefly examining the prehistory of the area, the mission period, and the legacy of the missions as the foundation of south Texas. NPS filmmaker John Grabowska welcomes any leads or insight that scholars of the Spanish Borderlands could offer regarding images, paintings, drawings, or other graphics that illustrate 18th century mission life. He can be reached at 304/535-6081.

New Publication on Spanish Missions Available

The National Park Service’s Department of the Interior and the Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions National Historical Park recently published an anthology of works on the Spanish Missionary Heritage of the United States. More than a dozen papers on the history and archeology of the Spanish missions are included in this publication that was an outcome of the Quincentenary Symposium held in San Antonio in November of 1990. It features papers by scholars and practitioners in the field of history and historical resource management. Students interested in the Spanish history of the Southwest will want to add this publication to their library. For information on how to order, contact the Superintendent, National Parks Service, 2202 Roosevelt Avenue, San Antonio, Texas 78210, (210) 229-5701.
Center Fellows Travel & Research

Each year, the Center administers funding that assists the Center Fellows with travel and research pertaining to the Southwest. This year’s Center Fellows travel and research trips are listed below:

Robert Fairbanks visited the National Archives (Washington, D.C.) to conduct research on his forthcoming book about Dallas history.

George Green attended the Texas State Historical Association meeting in Houston and conducted interviews regarding labor history.

Jeff Hanson attended the annual meeting of the American Anthropology Association in San Francisco to present a paper.

David Narrett traveled to Austin and Vermont to conduct research on Texas/Vermont Republics.

Dennis Reinhartz attended the 14th International Conference on the History of Cartography (Chicago) where he presented a paper and conducted research at the Newberry Library.

Doug Richmond attended and presented a paper at the Southwestern Social Science Association meeting in New Orleans.

Ken Roemer attended the Modern Language Association in New York, where he attended sessions on Native Americans in the Southwest.

Kathleen Underwood traveled to Colorado to conduct research on women teachers in the Southwest.

---

Interpreting the “Ancient” Peoples of the Southwest

“Northwest View of the Ruins of the Pueblo Pintado in the Valley of the Rio Chaco” by RH Kern (August 26, 1849) from Lt. James Simpson’s Navajo Expedition... (1853).

The southwest contains its share of still to be solved mysteries—remnants of peoples who once inhabited the region but disappeared. We know them from the “hard” evidence they left behind, such as archaeological features, and from “softer” evidence — their presence in the region’s folklore.

The Anasazi for example, left incredible cliff dwellings and other archaeological remains such as pottery and baskets when they abandoned their homes about 1200 A.D.

Several amazing sites in the southwest—including Mesa Verde (Colorado), Montezuma’s Castle (Arizona), and Chaco Canyon (New Mexico) are heavily publicized and visited by tourists. Despite more than a century of archaeological investigation, little is known about why their “cliff dwellings” were abandoned. Recent interdisciplinary study reveals that Chaco Canyon, for example, was far more than a series of small agricultural villages, and may have been an important ceremonial and trade center for the entire region.

How can places like Chaco Canyon be best experienced, and protected from the adverse impacts of thousands of tourists? Professor Richard Ferrier of UTA’s Architecture Department has been assisting the National Park Service by proposing alternative designs for the new visitor’s center at Chaco Canyon. Whereas Park Service plans called for the new center to be built in the Canyon close to the site of the current visitor’s center, Ferrier’s students have proposed alternative sites outside of the canyon. Visitors would learn about the region and its archaeological heritage before entering, and their impact would be minimized by coordinated bus trips to the numerous individual pueblo sites in the canyon.

For additional information, contact Dr. Richard Ferrier at the UTA School of Architecture, phone 817-273-2315.
Upcoming Events

Re-Discovering Arlington’s Heritage to be held on April 23rd

When the symposium “Discovering Arlington’s Heritage” was held in March of 1993, almost 100 people had to be turned away. Those who missed that symposium, and anyone interested in Arlington’s history, should mark April 23rd on their calendars. On that Saturday, Rediscovering Arlington’s Heritage will feature morning speakers and an afternoon field trip to historic sites. For more information, contact the Center.

Palo Alto Conference

The second annual Palo Alto Conference commemorating and interpreting the shared heritage of the Mexican American War (1846-1848) will be held on February 12 and 13th, 1994, at the University of Texas, Brownsville, Texas. For more information contact: Tony Knopp (512) 544-8260.

Meet the Center Faculty

Robert B. Fairbanks, an urban historian, joined the UTA faculty in 1981. Although his first book, Making Better Citizens, focused on twentieth century housing and planning reform in Cincinnati, Ohio, his research emphasis of late has been on the urban west, particularly Texas cities. He is finishing a book manuscript on Dallas entitled, For the City as a Whole: Planning, Politics and the Public Interest, 1915-1965. He has also initiated another study focusing on the history of public housing for Mexican-Americans in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio between 1933 and 1950. In addition, Fairbanks has co-edited and contributed a volume in the Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Essay series entitled Essays on Sunbelt Cities. He has published fourteen essays, including several dealing with Dallas airport development, politics, and planning.

As chair of the Center’s Curriculum Committee, Fairbanks helped develop a minor in Southwestern Studies. He serves as a Center Fellow, has just finished a term as a member of the Board of Directors of the Urban History Association, and continues to serve as American Book Review Editor for Planning Perspectives: An International Journal of History, Planning and the Environment.