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Linda Cordell. (Photo courtesy of University of Colorado).

Linda S. Cordell (1943–2013)

The woman who literally “wrote the book” on Southwest archaeology, Linda S. Cordell, died on March 29, 2013, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She was among the most respected U.S. archaeologists of her generation, having been elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 2005 and to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2008, as well as receiving the A. V. Kidder Award for Excellence in American Archaeology from the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 2001 and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) in 2009.

Linda Seinfeld was born on October 11, 1943, in New York City. Her father, Harry Seinfeld, was a pharmacist who died in 1963 while Cordell was still in college. Her mother, Evelyn S. Kessler, was a cultural anthropologist who earned

a Ph.D. from Columbia University and taught at the University of South Florida in the 1970s. Linda remembered visiting the office of her “godmother,” Margaret Mead, at Columbia as a young girl. She attended George Washington University, and in 1964 she was one of five GW undergraduates to join Florence Hawley Ellis’s University of New Mexico field school at the pueblo of Sapawe, an experience that sparked her lifelong passion for Southwest archaeology (Cordell 1989a). After receiving her bachelor’s degree in 1965, she went on to the University of Oregon, where she earned a master’s in 1967, and then to the University of California, Santa Barbara, for her Ph.D., which she completed in 1972.

Cordell joined the faculty of the University of New Mexico (UNM) in 1971; she served as chair of the Department of Anthropology from 1982 through 1987. In 1987, she was appointed as Irvine Curator and Chair of Anthropology at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco (becoming the only Southwest archaeologist with dolphins on her business card, she would say.) Although her tenure there was brief, it marked an important transition in her career toward museum administration. In 1993, she became director of the University of Colorado (CU) Museum of Natural History and professor of Anthropology, positions that she held until her retirement in 2006. After retirement, Cordell moved back to New Mexico, where she remained extremely active professionally. At the time of her death she held positions as senior scholar at the School for Advanced Research (SAR) in Santa Fe and, since 2010, as external faculty at the Santa Fe Institute (SFI).

Cordell’s research focused on the archaeology of pre-contact agricultural communities in the U.S. Southwest. She was widely considered the foremost authority on the archaeology of the Rio Grande region of New Mexico, the homeland of the Eastern Pueblos (e.g., Cordell 1979, 1980a, 1989b; Eckert and Cordell 2004). Throughout her career, she was engaged in examining problems related to changing strategies of mobility, settlement, and interaction in the context of the highly dynamic social and environmental landscapes of the Ancestral Pueblo world. She attacked these problems using a constantly evolving set of theoretical and methodological approaches that kept her work fresh and relevant to succeeding generations of Southwest archaeologists.

While Cordell was a graduate student, her advisor was Albert Spaulding, an avid supporter of the use of statistics, quantitative methods, and early computer applications in

archaeology. Her dissertation research (1972, 1975a) utilized one of the earliest computer simulations in archaeology to model settlement pattern changes on Wetherill Mesa, Colorado. Reflecting back on this work, Cordell noted that “the problem with the Wetherill Mesa simulation was that despite its simplistic (and mechanistic) approach to human behavior, it was remarkably successful in predicting the abandonment of some sites and the continued occupation or reoccupation of others. In effect, because the simulation worked, I felt that I learned very little” (1981:122). Despite this somewhat pessimistic assessment, Cordell continued to be interested in systems and network modeling in archaeology throughout her career, as is reflected by her later association with SFI. One of the lessons that she drew from this early work was the need to balance the anthropologist’s desire to relate specific cases to more generalized phenomenon with careful attention to the empirical details and dynamics of local history, environment, and archaeological practice—in other words, the need to build theory in archaeology from “the bottom up” (Cordell and Plog 1979, 1981).

Cordell loved archaeological fieldwork and was dedicated to training students in proper field techniques. While at UNM, Cordell supervised the departmental archaeological field school during eight seasons, including three at Tijeras Pueblo (Cordell 1975b, 1977a, 1977b, 1980b) and three at the site of Rowe, near Pecos (Cordell 1998). Many of the students who attended these field schools went on to become archaeologists of the Southwest and elsewhere. At both sites, Cordell utilized a variety of data-recording methods and field techniques that were innovative for their time, including the use of power equipment to remove overburden from deeply buried areas of the sites, electronic resistivity and proton magnetometry to locate subsurface features, laser transits for site mapping, and on-site microcomputers and laptops for field recording of excavation data and for creating artifact inventories (Cordell 1989a).

The Tijeras Project was begun by James Judge in 1971 (see Judge 1974) and was taken over by Cordell in 1974. This 14th-century site is significant because it was one of the earliest aggregated towns in the Rio Grande area and might have been one of the places at which glaze-painted pottery technology was first introduced to the Eastern Pueblos. In recent years, Cordell’s research interests returned to Tijeras, a place that was very close to her heart, both personally and professionally. She was collaborating with curatorial staff and volunteers at the Maxwell Museum to organize the artifact collections and research archives from the UNM field school excavations and was developing a new map and integrated GIS database for the site (Cordell et al. 2009). She was also working closely with several colleagues on research projects related to Tijeras Pueblo archaeology (e.g., Cordell and Damp 2010) and was advising the Friends of Tijeras Pueblo on updated signage for the interpretative trail and on exhibits for the newly constructed educational building at the site. Sadly, her work at Tijeras remains unfinished.

Cordell was an advocate for the use of new technologies not only in the field but also in the laboratory. Of particular significance were her collaborative efforts to use trace element and isotopic geochemistry to track the production and distribution of maize from archaeological contexts in the U.S. Southwest (Benson et al. 2003; Cordell 2012; Cordell et al. 2001b). This research demonstrated that much of the corn recovered from the Chaco great house of Pueblo Bonito was likely imported from outside the canyon, fueling ongoing debates about the role of Chaco Canyon in the broader Ancestral Pueblo world. Her support for the integration of advanced archaeometric techniques in archaeology as well as for multiauthored collaborations is also evident in her recent work on the later polychrome pottery traditions in the U.S. Southwest. Beginning around 2000 and continuing on and off over about a decade, she convened a small working group of ceramic specialists in Santa Fe during the summers to visit sites and examine relevant ceramic collections (meetings that Cordell referred to as “the Ceramics Slumber Party”). Among the direct outgrowths of this collaboration are Judith Habicht-Mauche’s analysis of the pottery from Tijeras Pueblo and Suzanne Eckert and Deborah Huntley’s excavations at the site of Goat Springs in southern New Mexico. In addition, it led to two symposia at the SAA meetings in 2002 and 2009 (published as Habicht-Mauche et al. 2006 and Cordell and Habicht-Mauche 2012) and two workshops at the SFI in 2007 and 2008. The SAA papers, by both established scholars and emerging younger experts, highlight a broad range of analytical approaches to the study of glaze-painted and polychrome pottery from across the U.S. Southwest.

Cordell’s wide-ranging interests and many productive collaborations resulted in an eclectic series of coauthored books, among them *Dynamics of Southwest Prehistory* (Cordell and Gumerman 1989), *Chiles to Chocolate* (Foster and Cordell 1992), *La Gran Chichimeca* (Cordell et al. 2001a), and *Southwest Archaeology in the Twentieth Century* (Cordell and Fowler 2005). However, arguably her most important contribution to Southwest archaeology is her textbook, first published in 1984 as *Prehistory of the Southwest*, with two subsequent revisions (Cordell 1997; Cordell and McBrinn 2012). This book is a comprehensive reference to the archaeology and culture history of the region and has become the standard text in most college courses on Southwest archaeology. Cordell also published a more popular overview, *Ancient Pueblo Peoples* (1994), as part of the Smithsonian’s Exploring the Ancient Worlds series.

Cordell was a highly effective museum administrator. As director of the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, she was responsible for raising much of the funding for and overseeing the renovations of a new, multi-million-dollar collections storage facility. While other universities were retreating from the maintenance of full-service public museums, she was able to increase the museum staffing by 40 percent. She also revitalized a moribund Museum Studies masters’ program, turning it into one of the top

programs of its kind in the country (Cordell 2000). She was particularly effective in integrating public programming at the museum with the primary research mission of the university.

Cordell was often sought out for high-profile consulting, service, and leadership positions. She held several elected offices in major professional associations, including positions on the Ethics Committee of the AAA and on the Executive Committee of the SAA. She also served as SAA Secretary from 2005 to 2007. She often consulted with Pueblo groups in New Mexico on cultural heritage issues and since 2011 was archaeological advisor to the Pueblo of Santa Ana. At the time of her death she was an active member of the Advisory Committee for the R. S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and the Galisteo Basin Archaeological Protection Act Advisory Committee. She died while preparing a presentation on the Galisteo Basin protection efforts, which was to be delivered as the opening address at a conference in Santa Fe the following day.

Over the years, at UNM and CU, Cordell taught a large number of introductory, upper division, and graduate courses in anthropology, archaeology, and museum studies. She was the principal dissertation advisor for at least six Ph.D. students and was a reader for numerous others; she also supervised many master's projects in anthropology and museum studies while at Colorado. Former students remember her as an inspirational teacher whose enthusiasm and passion for her chosen field was infectious. Several of her Ph.D. students noted her ability to recognize their specific talents and to push them in directions that fundamentally changed the course of their lives and careers. She also mentored many young archaeologists who were not directly her students. She did not suffer fools gladly and could be a harsh critic. But if she took an interest in one's work, things began to happen—doors opened, opportunities became available—often without her even acknowledging that she was involved. She wanted the people that she liked and valued to like and value each other, and thus she built many intellectual coalitions and personal networks that will long outlast her.

Though physically tiny, Cordell was a fierce, strong-minded person who broke the glass ceiling for women in many areas of our profession. She was married twice but had no children. She will be remembered as a treasured friend, a generous and esteemed colleague, a supportive mentor and teacher, an effective academic and museum administrator, and above all, for the leadership and dedicated service that she gave to her beloved profession of archaeology.

Judith A. Habicht-Mauche *Department of Anthropology, University of California Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA, 95064; judith@ucsc.edu; <http://anthro.ucsc.edu/faculty/index.php>*

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Queries

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