

# **A Peculiar Alchemy**

## **A Centennial History of SAR**

### **1907–2007**

Nancy Owen Lewis and Kay Leigh Hagan

With a preface by James F. Brooks

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Administration building, School for Advanced Research.



## James F. Brooks

**My first visit to SAR employed stealth.** The year was 1990. As a graduate student at the University of California, Davis, I was working toward a dissertation on intercultural slavery in the Southwest borderlands. I had devoted several summers to research in the New Mexico state archives and to fieldwork in the Hispano villages of northern New Mexico, bivouacking in the bed of “Betsy,” my 1978 Ford F150 pickup, at the now-vanished KOA Camel Rock campground north of Santa Fe. Acutely aware of the School’s extraordinary reputation as a center for advanced study (Jonathan Haas’s advanced seminar volume *The Anthropology of War* figured centrally in my thinking), I simply could not call up the courage to go openly to the School’s campus and introduce myself. So one August evening I parked along Garcia Street, slipped through the lower parking lot, and entered the breezeway separating the Wagner and Bandelier scholar apartments.

The sudden expansiveness of the descending stone terraces and the great cottonwood tree stunned me, as it has so many other first-time visitors. I had expected an intimate (if very large) “Santa Fe–style” adobe compound, not the visual equivalent of the Great Plaza and Bath of Pakistan’s Mohenjo-Daro. With increasing marvel I wandered the flagstone paths for about an hour, admiring the seamless blend of architecture and landscape, all the while hoping that no security personnel would nab me for trespassing. I remained unnoticed, and thus began an extended daydream of somehow, some way, gaining legitimate entry to the world of research and creativity that seemed so perfectly prefigured in the views I beheld.

I now know that I was not the first (and doubtless not the last) aspiring scholar to explore SAR surreptitiously. I also know how little I actually understood then about the School of American Research. Although a decade later I would have the honor of holding a National Endowment for the Humanities resident scholarship at SAR and in 2002 returned for what would prove an unexpected employment trajectory, I continue to find myself puzzled by this relatively small but exceptionally complex and vibrant institution.

How, I have wondered, could an institution founded to promote archaeological research in the American Southwest have grown to such significance in global anthropology? How did it negotiate the political minefields between anthropologists and the indigenous peoples they so often “studied”? How could the empiricism of social scientists and the expressiveness of indigenous artists coexist in a single institution? Why are SAR’s alumni—academics and artists alike, many of whose names are now legendary—so emotionally and professionally attached to its small campus and its quietly ambitious mission? What had SAR done right in the hundred years since its founding in 1907, and where had it failed?

The authors of this book aim to unravel this puzzle for readers inside and outside the organization by providing a history at once institutional and personal. The institutional aspect situates SAR within the history of anthropology and allied disciplines, as well as within the colorful history of Santa Fe and the School’s own multifarious denizens. The personal recollections are, of course, why most of us will delight in its pages.



The School's story in fact begins with names rather than disciplines, for the birth of anthropology in the United States relied on just a few visionary—and often quirky—individuals, many of whom played pivotal roles in what would become the School of American Research. The central names at the outset were those of Edgar Lee Hewett and Alice Cunningham Fletcher, the School's founders. Other names that are still well known among anthropologists and historians figured prominently in the early years: Sylvanus Morley, Jesse Nusbaum, Kenneth Chapman. Still others, then well known in the Southwest, played strong supporting roles: Frank Springer, John R. McFie, and Paul A. F. Walter, to name just a few. Less recognized but vitally important to SAR's making the Southwest a seedbed for the charter generation of women in anthropology were people such as Fletcher, Marjorie Ferguson Lambert, Florence Hawley Ellis, and Sallie R. Wagner. In this work, some of the characters find for the first time their proper place under the disciplinary sun.

**The institution—some would say empire—**that Edgar L. Hewett created thrived under his directorship for nearly forty years. Following his death in 1946, his hydra-headed institution began to shrivel, particularly after the New Mexico state legislature intervened to separate the School as a legal entity from the Museum of New Mexico in 1959. Twenty years after Hewett's death, little remained of the School of American Research but a stellar board of managers that had the foresight to hire an energetic new director, Douglas W. Schwartz, in 1967. Over the next thirty-four years, Schwartz would realize a new vision for the School as a “center for advanced study,” leading it to a position of international prominence at the brink of a new century.

To tell the story of the School's first hundred years, those of us involved in the project engaged two writers, one for the “rise and decline” part of the tale, with Hewett at its center, and another for the “rise again” part, the Schwartz years. Nancy Owen Lewis, an anthropologist and the School's director of academic programs, took on the assignment of researching and writing Part One, which to everyone's awe she somehow managed to do on top of her already heavy workload. Not only that, but she succeeded in turning a raft of documentary sources—few people from Hewett's years remained to be interviewed—into a fast-paced, anecdotal account that one reader of an early draft called a “page-turner.”

Kay Hagan, a freelance writer who for nine years had written the School's annual report, accepted the challenge of creating Part Two of the book. She found her share of documents to consult, but the heart of Part Two came from her interviews with more than one hundred people who knew the School well: current and former staff and board members, scholars and artists who had been involved in SAR's programs, and of course Douglas Schwartz. Hagan, too, awed us all, not only with her insight into the workings of the School but also with her professionalism as the project shifted course over five years, four SAR presidents, and three project managers.

We wanted the School's story to be told in pictures as well as words, and two additional staff members stepped up to tackle the huge task of picture research. Laura Holt, SAR's librarian, immersed herself in regional photographic archives, searching for images of people, places, and events important in the earlier decades of SAR's first century. It was, as one might imagine, a good deal of fun, but Holt, too, had to squeeze the work in around her usual library duties. Katrina Lasko, SAR's graphic designer, faced the same challenge as she searched for photos to illustrate later decades in the story. An accomplished photographer, she was sometimes heard to say, when the right shot proved nonexistent, “Well, I'll just go take a photo of that.” In the end Lasko pulled all these diverse pieces together and produced the visually exciting volume that you see before you.

**Edgar L. Hewett's vision of the School of American Research** blended education—the training of anthropologists and edification of the public—with ethnographic and archaeological

research and the preservation of excellence in Southwestern Indian art. Douglas W. Schwartz's vision of a renewed SAR brought these themes forward with an intensified emphasis on the global nature of anthropology—a discipline, after all, implicitly comparative—and a fresh approach to creativity among Native American artists in the goals of the School's Indian Arts Research Center. Around the themes of research and creativity he built an institution in which inventive scholars and informed artists dwelled side by side.

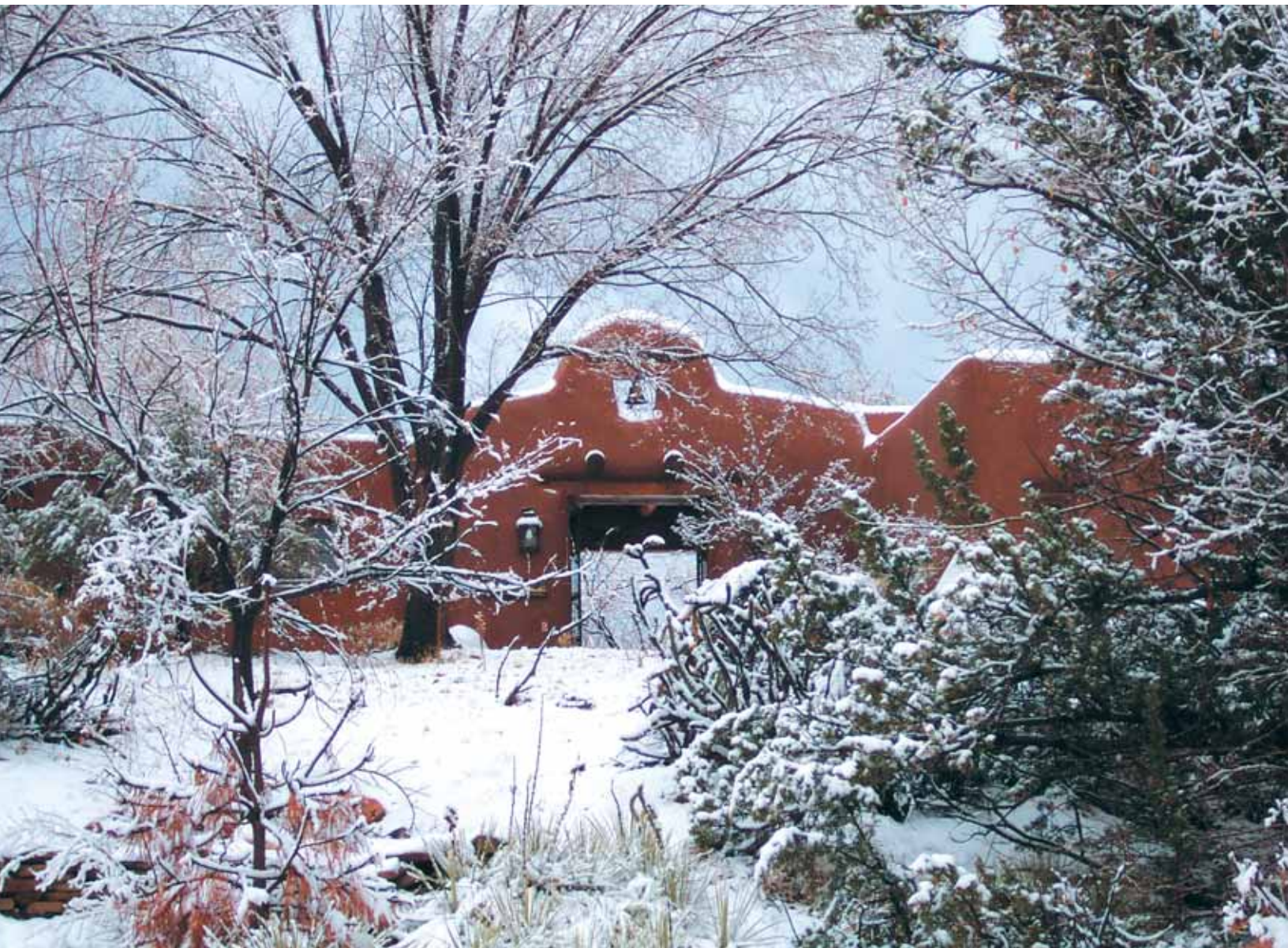
As I write, the School launches its second century of achievement. Whatever unknowns that century holds, I believe research and creativity will remain the institution's leitmotifs. Facing the cultural, political, economic, and environmental challenges of the future, no less than those of the past, will require drawing on the store of knowledge and insight that resourceful thinkers have generated on the strength of meticulous research and graceful writing. SAR's scholars now work in a world facing precipitous and unpredictable change—but perhaps not unimaginable change, if their knowledge of past cataclysms and contemporary upheavals can provide a deeper field-of-focus. SAR's artists will continue to stretch themselves across the chasm that often separates tradition and innovation, challenging their colleagues and appreciators alike to recognize that aesthetic expression emerges not simply from the maker's mind but also from the people and places that surround, shape, and inspire the maker.

In 1917, ten years after its founding as the School of American Archaeology, this institution's leaders acknowledged that its mission had grown broader than archaeology alone and changed its name to the more encompassing School of American Research. Throughout the last decades of the twentieth century, as the scope of SAR-supported research reached beyond the Americas to all parts of the globe and beyond anthropology to all the social sciences and humanities, its leaders repeatedly debated changing the name once again. In August 2006 the School's board of managers elected to lead the institution into its second century with a new name that bridges the facts of its previous hundred years with its aspirations for the future. We are now the School for Advanced Research on the Human Experience. We remain "SAR," and we remain committed to our time-tested programs, which underpin creative research and learned creativity.

Our next step is to fulfill our vision by illuminating issues of fundamental concern to our many and varied constituents. Few centers of advanced inquiry aspire to serve so broad a community, and none that I know of strives to do so by uniting research across the social sciences, the humanities, and indigenous aesthetic expression into a distinctive school of knowledge. Each day that dawns at SAR holds the promise that a biological anthropologist might drop in on a Hopi ceramic artist at work in her studio, and over fresh coffee an exchange of wisdom will produce awakenings that neither anticipated. SAR has long cultivated an atmosphere at once rigorous and collegial, conducive to both high standards and independence of thought. In such an atmosphere, new ideas may combine, under the synergy of their creators, to snap into sharper relief questions that trouble artists and scholars alike.

Such moments have distinguished the peculiar alchemy of SAR for a century now, and our pledge is to continue to seek unexpected connections and to support unforeseen advances in our comprehension of the human past, present, and future. Perhaps the next century will witness research and creativity increasingly embodied in one and the same person—the scholar-artist and the artist-scholar. If so, the School for Advanced Research stands ready to offer a venue for meaningful thinking, writing, discussing, learning, and creating. And as future young scholars and artists linger outside the gates, dreaming of the time they might join the ranks of those whose SAR-supported work has inspired them, we will invite them in.





Catherine McElvain Library, winter, 2006.



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Nancy Owen Lewis

No writer could hope for a subject more interesting or challenging than the School of American Research, and I thank Catherine Cocks for recruiting me. My gratitude goes to more than a hundred SAR participants whose gifts of time and memory enrich this work. Although a legion of fascinating stories awaits future historians with fewer space constraints, I trust that all who contributed will find themselves in these pages. Jeton Luna, Cecile Stein, Keith Basso, Marjorie Lambert, David Noble, Steven Feld, Estevan Rael-Gálvez, Duane Anderson, and Susan Foote provided particularly helpful insights. Thanks to James Brooks, Nancy Owen Lewis, Diane McCarthy, and all the SAR staff for their patience and good cheer, with special appreciation to George Gumerman for his wisdom and understanding. Beyond the obvious, Doug Schwartz provided a role model for following through, and Jane Kepp transformed an exasperating project into pure joy. Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to John McPhee and Laura Jolly for their inspiration.

Kay Leigh Hagan



Members of the staff and board of managers of the School of American Archaeology, Frijoles Canyon, about 1910. The person at top of ladder may be Santiago Naranjo; sixth down is Judge John McFie; ninth down is Frank Springer; at bottom is Charles Lummis. Kenneth Chapman leans on rock at left.