

In the Americas with Agnese Haury: A Remembrance

DAVID A. YETMAN

Agnese Haury, philanthropist, humanitarian, and internationalist, was driven by an abiding commitment to social justice and a love of anthropology and archaeology. From the 1950s until her death in 2014 at age ninety, Agnese used her wealth to promote the well-being of the people of the world and support research into the cultures that came before us. Although most of the projects that received her support were U.S.-based, she always kept in mind the broader needs of the planet.

I met Agnese in the mid-1980s through a common friend, the late lawyer Clague Van Slyke II. As an attorney, he represented a variety of clients, including some whose interests were affected by the government of Pima County, in which Tucson is located. I was then a member of the Pima County Board of Supervisors. From time to time, Clague would suggest that we have lunch and would invoke *pro forma* a project of one client or other, mention the client, then move on to more cosmopolitan topics.

Clague phoned me one day at my office and said, in his fatherly voice, “David, there is someone you need to meet.” I always interpreted these sorts of Clagueisms as most promising opportunities. I agreed at once. “How about if you join us for our law firm’s annual Christmas dinner at Janos’s restaurant.” That would be difficult to refuse. At the time Janos’s was Tucson’s finest dining place, located in a wing of an old adobe building now occupied by the Tucson Museum of Art. At the dinner, which was rather formal, Clague introduced me to Agnese Haury and seated us next to each other. For the next two hours we talked nonstop, and I realized I had met an extraordinary individual.

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Agnese Nelms Haury, with children in Oaxaca. (Courtesy Loren Haury.)

Agnese had become friends with Clague when his law firm had assisted her in establishing a program for providing interpretation services to non-English speakers who faced court proceedings. She had become indignant upon learning of the ongoing miscarriage of justice facing people having to appear in court but lacking English and an understanding of the U.S. legal system. To this day the program she funded is the basis for the National Center for Interpretation at the University of Arizona.

Soon afterward, I learned of her close friendship with Alger Hiss and his family. Hiss had been a high official in the U.S. State Department, accused of espionage and treason by, among others, Richard Nixon. In the Cold War hysteria of the late 1940s, a federal jury convicted Hiss of perjury in proceedings that Agnese considered a kangaroo court, a sentiment she retained until her death. Agnese had worked with Hiss when he was director of the Carnegie Endowment for International

Peace and held him in high esteem. I mentioned to her that my father had followed the Alger Hiss case and was also convinced that Hiss had been railroaded. Agnese revealed that she contributed heavily to Hiss's defense and to the support of his family while he was undergoing the judicial proceedings. Hiss's son Tony has been a long-time recipient of Agnese's generosity and has contributed pioneering work establishing world centers of biodiversity and connections among them.

Following that evening, and it was memorable, I do not recall any additional contact with Agnese until she joined me as a traveler to Alamos, Sonora, through a travel program that was the brainchild of Joe Wilder, director of the University of Arizona's Southwest Center. I had accepted a position there as a research social scientist in 1992. It was probably in 1994 that we made that trip. Dr. Wilder had asked me to undertake a re-publication and expansion of Howard Scott Gentry's 1942 publication called *Río Mayo Plants*, a seminal study of plants and vegetation with numerous references to the role plants have played in the lives of indigenous peoples of the Río Mayo region of southern Sonora and adjacent Chihuahua. Gentry's eye for detail and often-poetic prose made the book a scientific and literary classic.

In the early 1970s or thereabouts, Paul S. Martin, a professor of geosciences at the University of Arizona, had come upon Gentry's book and decided to re-visit the plant collecting sites Gentry listed—more than 100 of them, spread out over a 10,000-square-mile area in one of the wildest areas in Mexico. After years of fieldwork in the Sierra Madre Oriental in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, Paul had found the Sierra Madre Occidental even more diverse, and Gentry's insights inspired him to visit the area. His ambition was to expand the list of plants and add observations concerning the vegetation and ecological relationships, as well as any local knowledge of the use of plants. In the early 1990s, Paul approached Joe Wilder wondering if the Southwest Center could complete the expansion of Gentry's work, which was in rough form and required more energy for completion than he thought he could muster. Joe agreed, and over the next couple of years I—and numerous other folks—joined Paul in various plant collecting expeditions in the Río Mayo region. In roughly 1994 Joe asked me to take over the responsibility for getting the book published. At Paul's suggestion, it would be entitled *Gentry's Río Mayo Plants*. I spent the next couple of years doing little else.

During that trip to Alamos—a long drive in a van—Agnese and I chatted for hours. She knew of Paul Martin (I believe she had met him),

and I described my involvement in his project. I was already immersed in ethnobotanical studies of the Mayo people in the same region, so I viewed the Gentry book revision as a convenient expansion of work that I considered the fulfillment of a childhood dream. Agnese had also known Howard—he was part of a circle of what we might call Southwest field specialists, which included renowned archaeologist Emil Haury, whom she had married not long after our conversation at Janos's. Agnese and Emil had been married for fewer than three years when he died, but people who knew them at the time characterized that period as the happiest of both their lives. Until her death, Agnese remained in close contact with Emil's children and grandchildren. She had met Emil during his early archaeological excavations at Point of Pines, where Chip Lockwood, her first husband, and she worked as volunteers. Gentry, in the 1920s, had been a student of ethnographer Albert Kroeber, whom Emil had also met, and had studied under or at least conversed with the noted geographer Carl Sauer. All their paths eventually would cross, including Agnese's. She had some pithy comments on Sauer.

Agnese believed in the importance of fieldwork in both the natural and social sciences, and tried to support projects that required exploration and outdoor research. After we returned to Tucson from Alamos, she informed me that she would subsidize the expense—and it would be considerable—of completing the Gentry revision. The project would require a lot of travel and the hiring of a phalanx of plant taxonomists to pore over collections in the University of Arizona Herbarium, an exacting task that required a trained botanist's eye. The experts would need to identify plants pressed between sheets of paper, several thousand of them gathered over the years from the Río Mayo region, and compile annotated lists of species sorted out into classes, families, genera, and species. Not only did Agnese contribute a large sum of money for the work, she also recruited a friend of hers, Annie McGreevy, who joined Agnese in making a hefty contribution.

The book—we might call it a tome—was finally published in 1998 by the University of Arizona Press under the title *Gentry's Río Mayo Plants: The Tropical Deciduous Forest and Environs of Northwest Mexico*. In addition to Gentry's original work, it had six authors, led by Paul Martin.

After that time, I was in frequent contact with Agnese, advising her of the progress of that project and others. We met frequently for lunch and chatted about both of our interests. She reminisced about her work

for the United Nations in the early 1950s, which resulted in publications and recommendations for the development of economies and programs of social improvement in the Andes, Burma, and Libya. She exhibited remarkable familiarity with the Andean Altiplano of Ecuador and Bolivia, where she had spent considerable time under the sponsorship of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. During her work among indigenous peoples of the southern Altiplano she met with, and apparently collaborated with, Alfred Métraux, the Swiss ethnographer who was instrumental in the publication of the *Handbook of South American Indians*. This period must have been most influential. For the remainder of her life, she devoted inordinate attention to anthropological projects, especially for Andean specialists, and funded fellowships for graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Arizona.

Beginning in late 1999 until the time of her death, Agnese provided generous support for my research, much of which involved travel, and, later, for the PBS television series of which I was the host. On three occasions, she accompanied me, once to northwest Argentina, once to Ecuador, and once to Seville, Spain, where I was doing research in the Archivo de Indias, a repository of millions of documents from the Colonial Period in Mexico.

During the trip to Salta in northwest Argentina, we had the opportunity for limitless conversation. For Agnese, the high Andean plateaus there and later in Ecuador provided her with a chance to re-familiarize herself with the Andean landscapes and peoples she had visited extensively in the 1950s. Though she had not visited that part of Argentina before, the lofty, arid, windy, and cold Andean *puna* near the Bolivian frontier seemed to bring back happy memories to her. We visited the remote archaeological site of Los Amarillos, a cliff-top fortress of the pre-Incan Diaguita people high in the famed canyon known as the Quebrada de Humahuaca in the province of Jujuy. One of the site's principal excavators had been Axel Nielson, a native son of Argentina from Córdoba, who received his doctorate in anthropology at the University of Arizona. We visited Axel in his home in Tilcara, a chilly town at over 8,000 feet elevation in the Humahuaca canyon—a place of geological marvels and cultural complexity—in Jujuy Province. From Tilcara it was only a few miles north to Los Amarillos. She and I both marveled at Axel's house, which had been constructed primarily from railroad ties shaped from durable quebracho wood that he and others had salvaged from the recently abandoned railroad running through the Humahuaca canyon.

At Los Amarillos, Agnese did not feel up to making the steep climb to the site. I spent an hour or so exploring it, and then returned to where she was waiting in the shade of a large Argentine mezquite. On my way back I picked up a decorated pottery shard that someone had left lying on top of an ancient wall. I showed it to Agnese when I arrived back at the base. She looked at me askance and scolded, “It will be of no use to anyone, now.”

From Tilcara we drove north nearly to the Bolivian border. La Quiaca, at the Argentine frontier, is about 11,500 feet in elevation, and the *puna* or Altiplano was quite cold, in spite of it being summertime in the Southern Hemisphere. Worried about how the altitude and the cold might affect her, I turned around before reaching La Quiaca, but she felt we should continue. This was new territory and she didn’t want to miss out on anything. I overruled her. That night we shared a suite in Tilcara in a heaterless hostelry with leaking plumbing. She never complained a peep. In the morning, she demonstrated her usual hearty appetite, expressing impatience with skimpy Argentine breakfasts. The following night she and I cooked supper for a group of students and researchers who were visiting Axel. They had driven up from Buenos Aires, some 1,000 miles away. One of the guests was a rather strange woman. Afterward I asked Axel about her. He thought she had come with Agnese and me. None of the other guests knew who she was, either.

Agnese’s sturdy constitution showed up the following year in Ecuador as well. I was searching the western third of the country for columnar cacti for a book I was researching. She joined my wife, Lynn, and me for ten days, driving through mountainous west Ecuador in a small sedan with an Ecuadoran driver. We spent a night at a town called Salinas on the slopes of the volcano Chimborazo. Even though the town lies less than 2 degrees south of the equator, its elevation at around 12,000 feet produces frigid nights. High elevation, especially above 10,000 feet or so, also interferes with most people’s sleep. Our hostel had plumbing problems and water leaked all over the floors of our rooms. While Lynn and I spent a restless and chilly night under a mound of blankets, feeling the effects of the altitude, I worried about the effects on Agnese. But in the morning she appeared to be perfectly fine, even haler than Lynn and I felt. A few hours later, after approaching 14,000 feet while skirting Chimborazo’s base through the strange páramo vegetation, we indulged in a passable breakfast in a restaurant in Riobamba, a comparatively lush and tropical city at only 9,300 feet. From there we ventured to the

southern lowlands at Vilcabamba at 5,000 feet, and eventually to the Pacific at Guayaquil, with its sultry climate.

Over the years, Agnese little by little revealed details about her family. Early in our relationship she expressed little fondness for her mother or her father. As I recall, when she was about ten years old, her father decided to construct a mansion on the outskirts of Houston, using her mother's money. It would be a lengthy project, and during the construction her parents sent Agnese and her twin sister to live in Paris, for roughly two years. During that time, Agnese learned French and became (I believe) fluent in that language. However, she also felt quite abandoned and misused by her parents and did not have a close relationship with her sister. Her parents were able to construct the mansion due to her mother's fortune, which came from oil and timber. The family had its own railroad, built to transport lumber from their forest holdings in East Texas to points abroad. Afterward, her mother became owner of the Houston Airport, which Agnese's father came to manage. Later in our relationship Agnese softened in her criticisms of her parents, especially her mother. She related with pride that her mother had founded fifty-two Planned Parenthood clinics in Texas, a fact I find increasingly ironic as that state now tries to destroy what her mother had created seventy years before Agnese died.

At one of our lunches Agnese described the Houston mansion to Lynn and me in considerable detail, much to our delight. She even recalled the address. Lynn Googled the address on her iPhone and was able to call up a photograph. She showed the picture to Agnese who looked up in astonishment when she saw it, bewildered at Lynn's ability to produce such a wonder, right there in a booth over lunch.

Agnese had a special friendship with Julian Hayden. Julian operated an excavation service in Tucson and regularly purchased advertising space in local newspapers not so much to promote his business, but to promote his right-wing leanings. He was also a superb, self-taught archaeologist who possessed intimate knowledge of the Sierra Pinacate in Sonora, Mexico, just across the border from what is now Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Arizona. Julian was proud of his lack of formal education in archaeology, explaining that he was free of doctrines and theories and could form his own opinions about the past of the region, based upon what he found—and what he found was substantial. His careful fieldwork made him a respected figure in southwestern archaeology. Through archaeological circles Julian and

Emil Haury, the prototypes of formal and field archaeological training and practice, had become acquainted and each came to respect the other. Emil believed that some of Julian's theories—that humans had inhabited the Pinacate for 40,000 years, for example—were wildly incorrect, but he still respected Julian's hardy exploring of the volcanic badlands and his vast empirical knowledge and painstaking dissection of the wilds of the Pinacate and ancient peoples there and elsewhere. And Julian could not but respect Emil's enormous learning, erudition, and accomplishments. Emil was a profound egalitarian and the two became friends. Through this friendship, after Emil's death, Julian and Agnese maintained their ties. He lived in a humble adobe dwelling in central Tucson and she visited him there. She was one of the last people to visit Julian before his death in 1998 at the age of eighty-seven.

Agnese lived comfortably but simply, and disliked most of the trappings



Agnese Nelms Haury at Abu Simbel, southern Egypt, 1962. (Courtesy Loren Haury.)

of wealth. When flying, she always traveled in the coach section. Most of her wardrobe came from thrift stores. She traveled lightly, far more so than I, an ability she had picked up over the years during her extensive travels. She was accustomed to arranging her own agendas, transportation, and accommodations. In addition to her home in northwest Tucson, she for many years maintained an apartment in New York City and another near downtown Tucson. She was quite at home in Paris and had expressed an interest in studying all the 18th-century guardhouses at the entrances to the city. In addition to the Andes, she was especially fond of Turkey and Yemen and spoke nostalgically of Burma. From the time I became acquainted with her, her principal motor vehicle was a 1982 Mercedes diesel station wagon, which she purchased new in Germany, drove through Europe, and then had shipped to the U.S. At the time of her death in 2014, it was probably her favorite possession. In the late 1990s, she and two women friends drove in it across Mexico's Sierra Madre Occidental from Sonora to Chihuahua, a rather challenging mountainous drive, visiting the Cascada Basaseáchic, Mexico's tallest waterfall, and in general living it up. One day she reported to me with great sadness that her neurologist had forbade her to drive from that time on. She knew of her disease, but referred to it as "My condition." After her death, I purchased the vehicle from her estate. It is now the prized possession of a close friend of mine who maintains it in pristine condition.

Agnese did not suffer fools gladly. She was critical of academic ceremonies and often seemed uncomfortable with any public recognition of her philanthropy, partially, at least, because of the barrage of requests for funding she received. She was an admirer (and, apparently, a friend) of George Soros. She had strong opinions on musical and theatrical performances. She regularly criticized bureaucracies, especially those of the University of Arizona. She was impatient with anti-science politicians and expressed disgust with the second Bush administration. She was almost uncomprehending when Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, better known as Goni, the son of a wealthy Bolivian family with whom she had been well acquainted, was forced to flee from Bolivia due to his unpopular policies. Goni was twice elected president of Bolivia, but in the eyes of Bolivians turned from being a progressive nationalist to an authoritarian despot. His flight from the country made way for the eventual election of Evo Morales as president.

Perhaps dearest to Agnese's philanthropic heart was tree-ring research. The Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research had been established at the

University of Arizona in 1937 by A. E. Douglass and provided a tool that permitted the dating of pre-Columbian archaeological sites. Emil Haury had been one of the early archaeologists to incorporate tree-ring dating into his research. From Emil's innovative use of the new techniques, Agnese came to appreciate its importance to science, and over the years increasingly believed the laboratory had never been afforded the proper recognition by the University of Arizona (or anywhere else, for that matter). One of Emil's and her friends, Bryant (Bear) Bannister, was a long-time director of the tree-ring lab. He was a former student of Emil's and the two of them turned the lab into the world's leader in tree-ring research, with tentacles into archaeology, history, and, increasingly important, paleo climates, fire history, and climate change. For decades, the lab was housed in the University of Arizona Football Stadium in ancient, dreary, windowless quarters, while such emerging departments such as accounting, media arts, and marketing were housed in modern, well-appointed structures. For Agnese that was a sore point, symbolic of the university's indifference to a science that had been invented there but was not sexy enough to become a highly funded discipline. She had already endowed a training fellowship in the lab and built friendships with the faculty and students there.

Sometime after the year 2000, she approached the university, though Bear Bannister, I believe, offering to put up a huge sum of money for a new tree-ring building. It took nearly a decade of negotiations and an eventual coughing-up of funds by the University Athletic Department to come up with plans and funding for the building, a lengthy process that she found incomprehensible. When the building was finally dedicated in 2013 it was a great day for her, even though the dementia that stole richness from her life was already advanced. The building is named for Bannister, which gave Agnese considerable satisfaction.

In her last year, we could no longer go out for our usual lunches. She had loved dining at Las Margaritas Restaurant and frequently pointed out to me the booth where she and Emil had dined countless times. She got to know the staff there, though she gradually lost the ability to remember them. At Metropolitan Grill, now closed, she developed a fondness for the dessert called Mud Pie, which they served in a large chunk. She regularly was mystified as to how it appeared on our table but was quite willing to pitch in and devour her share. After the lunches were no longer possible, I often took a large cup of chocolate ice cream to her and no matter what hour, she would consume it all. I think that ice cream was one of the last pleasures in her life. ❖