

## **Place Matters: A History of ASAO Meeting Sites\***

Michael A. Rynkiewich

*Annual Meeting Site Coordinator 2007–2014*

On March 26, 1969, I was on a plane flying to Santa Cruz, sitting in the aisle seat with Bob Kiste in the middle and Gene Ogan by the window. We were on our way to attend a meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Eastern Oceania (ASAEO). It was an honor for me, an ABD grad student, to be included in this trip, though I did begin to wonder about my purpose as I handed over to my mentors the little bottles of whiskey and vodka that they gave everyone in those days. I didn't drink at the time, so my presence did have some added benefit for them. Ogan noted that, when he was my age, he had already been on his own for a while. I replied with what I hoped was Zen wisdom: "When you were my age, you were older than me."

Seriously, from the beginning of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO), even when it was the ASAEO, the goal was evident. Select a site where Pacific Island scholars, including graduate students, could share research plans and ethnographic findings in both formal and informal settings without unnecessary distractions, including the distractions of rank, of competition, or of city lights. At the meetings, I found myself in conversation with the likes of Leonard Mason, who was already an icon in Micronesian studies, and Ward Goodenough, whose 1955 article, "A Problem in Malayo-Polynesian Social Organization," provided the theoretical frame for my doctoral research. I also met with other graduate students like Mac Marshall, who was at the same stage as me, about to go to Micronesia to do his doctoral research and attending his first ASAEO meeting.

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## **ASAEO Site Selection in the 1960s**

This 1969 meeting followed the first meeting of ASAEO in March 1967, which had also been held at Santa Cruz. Vern Carroll, the organizer of the only session—a symposium on “Systems of Adoption and Fostering in Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia”—also set the vision, which was to make a “long-range plan for recurring conferences on social anthropology questions of comparative importance in the Pacific” (*ASAEO Newsletter* #1 [May 15, 1967]: 1). The perceived need was for more “systematic” work, and the model was Africa: to produce “organized comparative studies like those on politics and kinship that brought African social anthropology into focus” (*ASAEO Newsletter* #1: 1). The association would be shaped by shared communication about research in progress or completed and by strategic planning for future ethnographers in Oceania.

At that point, little was said about site selection, except that ASAEO was in partnership with the Center for Pacific Studies, headed at the time by Roger Keesing at the University of California–Santa Cruz. The association envisioned a close relationship with the American Anthropological Association (AAA), especially the Applied Anthropology section, as evidenced by the fact that the next two regional meetings, the only ones held in 1968, took place during the AAA meetings at Seattle and at the Applied Anthropology meetings in Berkeley. This relationship was to wax and wane over the years.

Even at the 1968 regional meetings in other venues, people were thinking about the next general ASAEO meeting. Symposia begun elsewhere continued on the topics of adoption, colonialism, kinship terminology, and land tenure in Oceania. Of these gatherings, two were theoretically interesting and two were politically charged. For example, during the 1968 colonialism symposium (not at an ASAEO meeting), Ron Crocombe “argued that our ritual

gatherings in the U.S. smacked of academic imperialism. He suggested that a meeting in the Pacific, in which Pacific Islanders could take part, would be a meaningful step in the right direction” (*ASAE0 Newsletter #3* [August 15, 1968]: 4). The University of the South Pacific in Fiji was suggested as a meeting site. Thus, early on several issues were raised that would not be resolved for many years. Who did ASAE0 belong to, and who belonged at ASAE0 meetings? Framed through the lens of site selection, these issues may not be resolved yet.

In the only 1969 *ASAE0 Newsletter*, published a month before the meeting, several other issues related to site selection were also raised. Despite Crocombe’s suggestion, the ASAE0 Executive Committee decided that the 1969 meeting would be held in Santa Cruz. The *Newsletter* touted the fact that “participants will be housed in dormitory rooms, and costs will be kept to a minimum” (*ASAE0 Newsletter #4* [February 1969]: 1). Further, the editor noted, “We particularly hope that a number of graduate students planning to do Pacific research will be able to take part in the meetings. The setting will be casual, scenic, and hopefully sunny (with such a concentration of magical knowledge, we should be able to manage *that!*)” (*ASAE0 Newsletter #4*: 1–2). Thus, standards began to emerge for future site selection: the site should be scenic but affordable, and formal enough for academic sessions but informal enough for professors and graduate students to mingle.

Concerns that meetings be accessible and welcoming to Pacific Islanders persisted. The same *Newsletter* raised the possibility that a future meeting, perhaps in 1970, would be held in Fiji. The editor noted:

One advantage of Fiji as a conference site is that more scholars from Australia and New Zealand could be included. A second is that some [ASAE0] conference programs could build around Pacific Islanders as well as overseas scholars. Some of us are beginning to worry very seriously about the problem of Academic Imperialism in the Pacific. Suggestions as to how Pacific political leaders,

students, and others might meaningfully be incorporated will be particularly welcomed. (*ASAEO Newsletter #4: 2*)

Once again, it would actually be many years before site selection actually moved in these directions. However, another issue had been raised. Was ASAEO an American academic organization, or would scholars residing in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands (e.g., Fiji) also have ownership? This ongoing question would expand to consider scholars from Europe and Asia as well.

### **ASAO Site Selection in the 1970s**

The 1960s practice of the Executive Committee itself making the site selection continued into the 1970s, though the process eventually faltered. The committee named a Program Chairman [*sic*] and a person to be in charge of local arrangements (without capital letters and thus not a formal office). Prominent members who lived in certain regions of the country, particularly the East Coast and the West Coast, were asked to scout out sites and send the information back to the committee. The informality of such a process and the failure to name an accountable officer for the task caused some anxious moments.

Early in 1970, a constitution had been written and ratified, with a name change to ASAO signaling that New Guinea was now included (see the paper by Alexander Mawyer and Alan Howard regarding ASAO sessions and topics, which initially focused on comparison within Polynesia, Micronesia, and Island Melanesia). The constitution declared that the purpose of ASAO was “to advance the study of comparative social anthropology in Oceania through symposia, joint publication and research coordination” (*ASAO Newsletter #5* [March 1970]: 1). The only officers named were Secretary, Series Editor, and Program Chairman. There was no association meeting in 1970, though there were two stand-alone meetings under the umbrella of

ASAO, one on “Relocated Communities” at the University of Washington in April and one on “Bismarck Archipelago Ethnography” in June (*ASAO Newsletter* #6 [November 1970]: 3–4, 5–6).

Likewise, there was no ASAO meeting in 1971, although the Executive Committee did meet in Honolulu to continue the process of organizing. There seemed to be a sense that the regional meetings were serving the purpose for the time being. Published guidelines for “Annual Meetings” included nothing about site selection but dwelt instead on the types of gatherings that would be held at the annual meetings (*ASAO Newsletter* #7 [March 1971]: 4).

The Executive Committee convened again during the AAA meetings in New York in November 1971, “in an open meeting to which all members and prospective members were invited” (*ASAO Newsletter* #9 [Winter 1972]: 1). Interest was high, as over 100 people came to hear about this new organization. Vern Carroll announced that the first ASAO Annual Meeting would be held from March 29 through April 1, 1972, at Rosario’s Resort-Hotel on Orcas Island in the Strait of San Juan de Fuca in Washington State. Len Mason was named Program Chairman while Carroll and Mike Lieber would take care of local arrangements (*ASAO Newsletter* #9: 1). Later in the same issue, the editor listed some frequently asked questions, including one about the nature of the proposed annual meetings:

Q. What sort of “Annual Meeting” does ASAO hold?

A. Our aim is to have meetings that are (1) relaxing; (2) good opportunities to get to know each other better; and (3) intellectually profitable, hopefully with some measurable output. Thus we aim to have three-day meetings in quiet, scenic surroundings (away from large cities), with two full days devoted to each symposium. There will be a limited number of symposia (e.g., four). Discussions at these symposia will center around previously circulated position papers and will represent one stage of monograph preparation. (*ASAO Newsletter* #9: 8)

Note that the value of informality and *gemütlichkeit* were foregrounded again. The contrast is often made to the AAA meetings, as Doug Oliver had commented in 1968:

Observing that the size, alcoholic consumption, and distractions of American Anthropological Association meetings now make it difficult for specialists to communicate about their specialty, Dr. Oliver felt a concentrated dose of Pacific anthropology would be more enjoyable and more productive. (*ASAEO Newsletter* #3: 2)

At the 1972 meeting at Rosario's Resort-Hotel, the planning process was a mix of transparent and concealed. The Executive Committee consulted "with all those attending this year's meeting," and then "formulated the following plans for spring's meeting" (*ASAO Newsletter* #10 [Spring 1972]: 10). The 1973 meeting was slated for the same venue, Rosario's Resort-Hotel, with Alan Howard as Program Chairman. The Executive Committee then scheduled the 1974 meeting at Asilomar Conference Grounds on the Monterey Peninsula (*ASAO Newsletter* #11 [Winter 1973]: 2). In effect, the Executive Committee was making the site selections and handling local arrangements. For the first time, the Executive Committee also announced that the 1975 meeting would be on the East Coast, thus recognizing that there were as many Pacific anthropologists there as on the West Coast. Jane Goodale, who was on the Executive Committee, suggested Nantucket Island (*ASAO Newsletter* #11: 2).

In December 1972, the Executive Committee met at the AAA meetings in Toronto, and announced the "selection of Jane Goodale as the advance organizer of information on possible sites, etc., for the 1975 East Coast meeting" (*ASAO Newsletter* #11: 2). The committee seemed to be searching for a position and a title for someone to handle meeting site logistics but had not yet arrived. That would change.

As the 1973 meeting at Rosario's drew closer, the complexity of the local arrangements emerged as Mike Lieber and James Nason tried to organize accommodations, transportation

from airports to the island (which involved buses and ferries and was quite complex), and meals on the island, which all had to be taken at the resort (*ASAO Newsletter* #11: 13–15). Things did not improve for the 1974 meeting at Asilomar Conference Grounds, which is a state-owned facility, a part of Asilomar State Beach. Because it was not private, the local arrangements chairman, Robert K. McKnight, had to manage reservations, have the secretary of ASAO pay for both room and board for everyone, and then collect the money from those attending. In addition, he had to manage the various transportation options for people (*ASAO Newsletter* #14 [Winter 1973]: 4–6). Attendance was down to 45 at this meeting, compared to 60 at the 1972 meeting (*ASAO Newsletter* #15 [Spring 1974]: 1). This was now the third meeting in a row where managing transportation was a major issue. Getting people to and from the meeting venue would surface again and again as part of the responsibility of site selection.

Several major steps were taken at the 1974 meeting to distinguish ASAO meetings from other similar meetings and to sharpen the site-selection process, which had been rather haphazard to this point. First, the Executive Committee decided to cut the ties that had linked ASAO to the AAA, declaring that “we would no longer attempt to convene a general meeting of ASAO during the AAA meetings each Fall. It was also decided that ASAO would not sponsor symposia at the AAA meetings” (*ASAO Newsletter* #15: 8). The effect of this decision would be to redirect the gaze of Pacific Islands anthropologists away from the AAA and toward ASAO.

A second issue concerned the method of selecting sites. The committee reported: “The discussion of the 1975 Annual Meeting of ASAO was hampered by the unavoidable absence of Jane Goodale, but proceeded on the understanding that a suitable site had not yet been located” (*ASAO Newsletter* #15: 8). In effect, the practice of simply asking people to investigate sites and bring information back to the committee (called “the Board” for the first time in this *Newsletter*)

was not a reliable procedure. Unable to announce the site for the next year's meeting but having narrowed the possibilities to New England, the South Carolina coast, or the Florida area, the Board bravely declared that "these areas represent the Board's determination that an eastern seaboard meeting remains a top priority for 1975, with the exact site to be determined by our ability to locate a resort facility suitable for our requirements" (*ASAO Newsletter* #15: 8-9).

In the Summer 1974 *Newsletter*, the Board inexplicably declared that "we quickly learned that very little information was available on eastern resorts and conference sites that are suitable for our requirements" (*ASAO Newsletter* #16: 1). One might ask: Could this be true? People on the East Coast don't have conferences? Hotels, resorts, and conference centers on the East Coast tend to keep their establishments a secret?

In truth, the problem is, when everyone is responsible, no one is responsible. The rather loose system, which had produced meetings only in two places, Rosario's Resort-Hotel and Asilomar Conference Grounds, failed when the Board tried to move out of its own comfort zone: the northern half of the West Coast. What seemed like a simple process was actually no longer easy. The forthcoming meeting was rescued by Mike Lieber, who did the research and produced a report about possible sites on the East Coast (*ASAO Newsletter* #16: 1).

The 1975 meeting was booked at the Sheraton Resort Inn in Stuart, Florida, which had typing services but no WiFi (joke). Lieber still had to negotiate accommodation rates, though there is no evidence of anything other than a verbal contract to use a certain number of rooms. At the meeting, Lieber doubled as ASAO Chairman and local arrangements chair (along with J. Jerome Smith). What had been described as "the delay in reporting ... to our membership the specifics of our next meeting" (*ASAO Newsletter* #16: 1) was acknowledged in the August 1975 issue as "the problem of selecting a site" (*ASAO Newsletter* #17: 2). But instead of naming a new

officer as the site coordinator, the Board took recommendations for sites from the floor. Someone suggested Lake Mohonk, New York, “and it was rejected primarily for climatic reasons—New York being likely to be quite cold in the early spring” (*ASAO Newsletter #17: 2*). This concern with wintry weather would come back to haunt the site selectors in later years. Instead, “the Board recommended Charleston for several reasons, including favorable prices for food and lodging, accessibility from the airport, the availability of general conference facilities, a maritime environment, an historical setting, and a reputation for excellent seafood” (*ASAO Newsletter #17: 2*). In effect, this line of reasoning broadened the criteria for site selection for later years, adding “a maritime environment.”

The sense that there was a “problem” with site selection was explained, along with an appeal for help from the members:

The chairman apologized for seeking nominations and closure on the question of meeting sites in the same session. The goal was to catch up on scheduling at this meeting to allow for a full year’s input on nominations for subsequent meeting sites, the time and place to be decided by discussion and membership vote at each Annual Meeting for the upcoming year. Persons interested in making such nominations for the 1977 Annual Meeting should contact any member of the Board of Directors (see below) *before* the meeting in Charleston in late February, 1976. All nominations should include specifics on hotel facilities, rates, proximity to major transportation centers, and any other special considerations that may make the site attractive for ASAO members. Nominators should also be prepared to accept responsibility for acting as local arrangements chairman (if possible), in the event their nomination is selected. Karl Heider will serve as the local arrangements chairman for the Charleston meeting. (*ASAO Newsletter #17: 2*)

What is remarkable here is that, faced with a broken system, the Board moved only to tinker with it. The “problem” apparently lay with the members who, the Board thought, should step up their information gathering and deliver informed recommendations to the Board. The Board did not yet see that an officer should be named who would have the authority to do the job and could be held accountable for the results.

The Board did finally put in print a site selection criterion that had been floating around in people's minds: that the ASAO meeting sites "be alternated between the east and west coast starting next year for every year thereafter" (*ASAO Newsletter* #17: 2). After having cut ties with the AAA, the Board was still aware that an anthropologist situated on the East Coast might be burdened by flying to the West Coast in November for the AAA meetings and then flying to the West Coast again for the ASAO meetings. So they suggested that, in addition to alternating, the meetings should be held on the opposite coast from the AAA meetings, if possible.

And so, the Fifth Annual Meeting was held at the Mills Hyatt House in Charleston, South Carolina. Karl Heider, as local arrangements chair, was finally able to suggest that members make their reservations directly with the hotel and was able to leave people on their own for transportation. He still had to deal with some group meals (*ASAO Newsletter* #18 [October 1975]: 1–2). And once again, in the report from that year's plenary session, one finds references to "the problem of selecting a site for next year's meeting" (*ASAO Newsletter* #20 [April 1976]: 11).

Using the amended process, the Board took nominations from the floor. The Hotel Coronado del Mar in San Diego was rejected and, instead, the Asilomar Conference Grounds was selected, again. Bob McKnight agreed again to be the local arrangements chair. It appears that rather than solve "the problem," the Board retreated to an old familiar site, but that site lacked one thing: access to any restaurant outside the conference center. As it turned out, Asilomar was unavailable, and so McKnight booked the Holiday Inn just a few miles outside of Monterey. He described it as "amid the sand dunes on the sea shore" (*ASAO Newsletter* #20: 13); however, another apt descriptor might have been "isolated."

Dissent was seen in the submission of “a proposal to move the 1977 meetings to the French West Indies” (*ASAO Newsletter* #21 [June 1976]: 2), but the Board rejected the suggestion. In the next *Newsletter*, McKnight admitted that “we will be too far from Monterey proper for all except evening meals,” and thus breakfast and lunch would have to be eaten on site (*ASAO Newsletter* #22 [November 1976]: 1–2). This was reiterated in the following issue, along with some rather detailed forms revealing that the local arrangements chair had to micromanage registration, meals, and transportation again (*ASAO Newsletter* #23 [December (1976)/January 1977]: 1–3).

At the Monterey meeting in 1977, the Board decided that the 1978 meeting would be held at the nearby Asilomar Conference grounds, thus ignoring their recently adopted rule about alternating between the coasts. However, they did admit that they had a problem with regard to finding conducive meeting venues. They declared again that “future meetings sites will be alternated between the east and west coasts,” adding that “the feasibility of holding ASAO meetings every three or four years in a foreign location is also being considered” (*ASAO Newsletter* #24 [Combined Spring and Summer 1977]: 11).

Recognizing that the ad hoc process of inviting nominations for meeting sites was not working very well, the Board finally made a move to formalize the process.

In other business, the Board approved the formation of a standing subcommittee for investigating possible ASAO meeting sites on the east and west coasts. It is anticipated that the meeting schedule will be booked at least one year in advance. The subcommittee will recommend sites to the Board for final action. (*ASAO Newsletter* #24: 12)

This too would prove untenable, but it was a step toward the appointment of a single site selection officer.

Ivan Brady was named to “form a subcommittee to research future sites, presumably with a representative from each coast and perhaps the Gulf of Mexico area” (*ASAO Newsletter* #26 [Spring 1978]: 1). In the meantime, the Board rejected the Caribbean and other areas and instead selected Florida as the area for the 1979 meeting. Vern Carroll was named Local Arrangements Chair and thus was tasked with finding a specific site.

In the next Summer 1978 *Newsletter*, Carroll reported:

The next annual meeting of ASAO will be held at the Belleview Biltmore, Clearwater, Florida (near Tampa). ... This site has been chosen, after much searching, and on-site inspection, to provide congenial surroundings for productive academic and social interchange. There is good tennis, spectacular golf, a small swimming pool, comfortable meeting rooms, decent food—and not much else in the immediate vicinity. ... Jackets and ties are required in the main bar and dining room after 6 p.m., a custom in much of the South. (*ASAO Newsletter* #27: 15)

The quote reveals several tensions. First, Carroll conveyed the impression that gathering good information for site selection is a difficult, lengthy, and tiring process; and speaking from experience, I can say that it is. Second, this site fit some of the criteria, but not others—and that is true of nearly all sites that are explored. In this case, the site was again isolated and, at least at 6:00 p.m., it was not informal and relaxed. Finally, the registration process was still a burden for the local arrangements chair because space at the inn had to be reserved.

At that meeting, the Board finally realized that, in addition to the Secretary, Program Chair, and Series Editor, they needed an officer to coordinate site selection:

At the 8th Annual Meeting of the Association, the Board of Directors created a new position within the organization, that of Local Facilities Coordinator (known affectionately as Local Arrangements Czar). This will be a continuing position with the appointee to serve at the pleasure of the Board.

The point to creating this position is to insure continuing oversight of the process by which sites are selected, local arrangements are made, and annual meeting programs articulated with the locale in which they are held. In addition, our having this position will promote forward planning of meetings, the orderly

recruitment of regional specialists to scout out possibilities, and the development of extensive site files.

The Board retains the right to dictate which general region the meeting will be held in each year (following the formula now firmly established that in odd-numbered years our meetings will be held closer to the East Coast than to the West, and closer to the West Coast than the East in even-numbered years). (*ASAO Newsletter* #30 [Spring 1979]: 4)

The Board delegated all the responsibilities that had been collectively held by them, except for the final decision of which site to select. Ironically, they couched this in language that implied that the selection of sites had somehow eluded their oversight and announced with a rather imperial tone that the appointment of this officer would recover this privilege. So a rather ad hoc process of asking for nominations was turned into a more aggressive policy of one person actively creating proposals for sites.

The Local Facilities Coordinator (LFC) will be responsible for the entire process of selecting the site, negotiating terms, insuring adequate space for the various annual meeting functions, getting adequate reservation information to the membership and overseeing the physical conduct of the meetings. No Board member or other officer shall make any representations concerning specific sites or any other aspects of local arrangements except via the LFC. (*ASAO Newsletter* #30: 4–5)

In addition, the LFC, Vern Carroll in this case, was authorized to deputize three Local Arrangements Persons (LAP). He named Mike Howard for the San Diego area for the 1980 meeting, and for 1981 possibilities, Cathy Carlin for the Gulf Coast and Glenn Peterson for Savannah and the Sea Islands.

Criteria for the “ideal site” were also listed:

1. Comfortable, spacious, attractive meeting rooms.
2. Plenty of places for informal meetings of 2, 3, 6—or a dozen persons, at any (reasonable) hour, away from bedrooms. Adequate and convivial facilities should be available for “happy hour” and for late evening socializing.

3. Regular, dependable, and inexpensive transportation available from the nearest airport (not more than an hour's drive). An airport well served from all parts of the country.
4. Every effort made to minimize costs (we are mindful of the problems of students or the unemployed) although we shall not settle for vastly inferior facilities in an effort to save 10–20% on hotel bills.
5. Dining flexibility (dining room, coffee shop and room service open at all hours, nearby restaurants with great ethnic food, optional participation in group meals).
6. The capacity of the site staff to meet our conference needs—lots of space, A-V equipment, coffee service, efficient registration procedure, without huge investments of our time once the meetings have started. These needs—directly related to our primary purposes—greatly limit our capacity to book ourselves into any place that is really cheap. (*ASAO Newsletter* #30: 5–6)

These criteria emerged from an earlier shorter list and reveal some growing concerns. There was tension between wanting an inexpensive site and yet expecting to have lots of space (spacious) and nice (attractive) surroundings. Hidden in the careful language was the admission that an isolated site was not an ideal site. The criteria called for “nearby restaurants” and “optional participation in group meals,” meaning that people were getting tired of being stuck in large groups at the lone restaurant at an isolated site. Gone were the days when living in a dormitory and eating dormitory food as a group was acceptable to the membership.

### **ASAO Site Selection in the 1980s**

As it turned out, the 1980 meeting was held at The Flagship in Galveston, Texas, a site not on the radar in summer of 1979 (although Mike Howard was actually at the University of Houston, and so it makes some sense). The site description reveals the significance of what I said in the previous paragraph: “The Flagship is located on a pier along the beach in Galveston *and is within easy walking distance of other hotels, restaurants and whatever else Galveston has to offer*” (*ASAO Newsletter* #31 [Summer 1979]: 16–17; italics mine). The phrase, “within easy walking

distance of other hotels (and) restaurants” was soon transformed into “within easy walking distance of other bars and restaurants” and became a major criterion for selection.

At Galveston, for the first time, Pacific Islanders were able to attend the meetings:

A number of Pacific Islanders attended the meetings. Executive Directors of Micronesian Community Action Agencies and associated personnel Juan Babuata (Marianas), Ismael Dobich (Truk), Kodaro Gallen (Ponape), Katherine Kesolei (Palau), Michael Konelius (Marshalls), Jim Jacobson (Saipan), and Stan Allen (Community Service Administration, San Francisco) were present for the Symposium on Dependency and Development,' as was John 'Woikim, a Papua New Guinean.

Four Pacific Islander women, funded by conference grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific, participated in the Symposium on Women in Oceania. Lolita Huxel, a Chamorro, co-authored a paper delivered at the conference; she is a linguist and member of the faculty at the University of Guam. Piti Maike, a Solomon Islander, is Social Development Officer of Women’s Interests in the Ministry of Youth and Cultural Affairs in the Solomons. Latu ‘Eveline Fusimalohi, a Tongan, is a graduate student in education at Stanford University. Mary Karen Sungino, a Palauan, is an anthropology student at the University of Guam. (*ASAO Newsletter* #34 [Spring 1980]: 1–2)

The next year’s (1981) meeting site was announced as the Sea Lodge in La Jolla, California (*ASAO Newsletter* #35 [Summer 1980]: 2). The “meeting czar,” still Vern Carroll, had noted that the choice of the West Coast was appropriate since the November 1980 AAA meetings were held on the East Coast, in Washington, DC (*ASAO Newsletter* #33 [Winter 1980]: 7).

The Annual Meetings Coordinator—a new title, changed from Local Facilities Coordinator (which made that person sound like a plumber)—was planning ahead. Carroll announced that:

The 1982 meetings will be held on or near the East Coast. I will be happy to receive suggestions concerning a particular town or establishment but only until September 1 of this year. If your suggestions are more general (areal, regional), I will send you a guide on how to canvass an area to find the sorts of places we are interested in. (*ASAO Newsletter* #35: 3).

Further, he was projecting out three years to 1983.

The 1983 meetings will be held on the West Coast or in the Southwest. A reservation has been applied for at Asilomar but alternatives are being explored. While most people find Asilomar a nice place to have meetings, there are two sorts of disadvantages that make those responsible for planning your meetings somewhat less enthusiastic. The Association must contract well in advance to pay for a certain number of rooms and meals regardless of whether they are used or not. All arrangements must be finalized within a very small margin of error three months ahead of time. That means that those who pay in advance and decide not to attend receive no refund. Those who do not pay for accommodations before the deadline will not be able to attend. Also, members of the Association will not be able to reserve and pay for anything less than the full package (four days; three meals a day). The rates are, to be sure, reasonably attractive, but since there will be some add-ons, the cost per person will be far from trivial. Unlike most hotels, Asilomar reserves the right to change the rates up until 90 days before the meetings.

There are other areas of inflexibility at Asilomar of which members should be aware. All rooms will be doubles; no singles or triples are available. Mealtimes are fixed at 7:30 AM, noon, and 6 PM. There is no parking on the grounds for those who do not occupy rooms. (*ASAO Newsletter #35: 3*)

Continuing problems with site selection, both location and cost, surfaced in the Fall 1980 *Newsletter*. Sherwood Lingenfelter posted a letter inviting all those who could not afford to attend the planned meeting in La Jolla to come to “the Conference Center of the Fancher Campus of the State University College at Brockport for March 5–8, 1981, to hold a Poor Man’s Caucus of ASAO for 1981” (*ASAO Newsletter #36: 6*). Jack Fischer, Chair of the Executive Committee, responded sympathetically that “if enough members express this concern to the Meetings Coordinator (Vern Carroll) and other officers, we can choose less elegant meeting sites,” but encouraged everyone to come to the La Jolla meeting in the meantime (*ASAO Newsletter #36: 7*).

At the end of that *Newsletter* was a hurriedly appended note regarding a last-minute change in venue:

ASAO Members: The Editors regret that the fall Newsletter has been delayed. As the current issue was being returned from the printers, we were notified that the Sea Lodge in La Jolla had cancelled ASAO reservations. Michael Howard and

Vern Carroll have completed new arrangements for the Catamaran Hotel—still in San Diego, same dates and lower rates. (*ASAO Newsletter #36*: 13).

The last *Newsletter* before the 1981 meeting, dated “Winter 1981,” revealed the disarray of the site selection process leading ASAO Executive Committee Chair, Jack Fischer, to call for a “Debate on Meeting Site Policy.” Here is a portion of the call:

Our membership has increasingly complained about the rising cost of attending the annual meeting. In the past, when travel costs were lower and travel funds more widely available, most members seem to have enjoyed the policy of meeting in out-of-the-way coastal resorts where reduced rates were available out of season. However, in recent years hotel rates and air fares have been rising more rapidly than academic salaries. This year especially more and more of our members have spoken out for choosing cheaper, more accessible, but less glamorous meeting sites. ... The most recent expression of such a view to come to my attention is in a letter from our Permanent Meetings Coordinator, Vern Carroll.

A survey of the current location of our membership shows the following distribution, in order of regional concentration:

- 67 Oceania (Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, various Pacific Islands)
- 56 West Coast (GA, OR, WA)
- 51 Middle Atlantic (all coastal states VA through NY, including PA)
- 41 Midwest (OR, KY, MO, KS and states north of these)
- 13 New England
- 12 Southeast (TN, NC, and states south, plus LA)
- 12 Eastern Canada (Ontario and east)
- 12 Europe
- 8 Mountain states (AZ, NM, and north to ID, MT)
- 5 Western Canada and Alaska (Manitoba and west)
- 4 Southwest (TX, OK, AR). (*ASAO Newsletter #37*: 7–8)

The call went on to note that in this regional grouping most of the members were in Oceania, but if one combined Canada and the United States, that number was three times higher. So, he concluded that it still made sense to hold most meetings in North America. While the Northeast (US and Canada) was heavily represented in terms of members, in the past the “East Coast” as a meeting location was taken to mean the Southeast US because of weather concerns. The local arrangements chair wondered whether humbler (as opposed to luxurious) accommodations, say

in a university setting or not on the ocean at all, might be more attractive now (*ASAO Newsletter* #37: 8). Clearly the tensions, as well as temperatures, were rising: between East, West, and Oceania; between scenic coastal and affordable anywhere; and between rising costs and stagnant salaries.

The Spring 1981 *Newsletter*, reporting on the San Diego meeting, noted that “a great deal of discussion took place regarding the proposed location for next year’s meetings” (*ASAO Newsletter* #38: 1) but it was decidedly brief in its actual site announcement:

The location for the 1982 meetings has been finalized. We will be going to the SEA PALMS GOLF AND RACQUET CLUB, ST. SIMON’S ISLAND, GEORGIA. Details on room rates, food, meeting facilities, and transportation will be printed in the summer *Newsletter*. The local arrangements will be handled by Ivan Brady (SUNY Oswego). The dates for the meetings will be from Wednesday March 3, 1982 to Sunday, March 7, 1982. (*ASAO Newsletter* #38: 10)

However, once again, the early announcement was premature and had to be changed later in the year. In fact, a “Special Edition” of the *Newsletter* was issued with only one item, the meeting site:

The ASAO Annual Meeting is set for March 3–7, 1982 at the HOLIDAY INN, HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA, instead of the Seam [*sic*] Palms Golf and Racquet Club, primarily because of a change in management and terms at the latter. Hilton Head lies in the southwestern corner of South Carolina about 30 miles north of Savannah, Georgia. The Inn is about 50 miles from the Savannah Airport and is readily accessible by all common means of transportation. (*ASAO Newsletter* \*Special Edition\* [June 1981]: 1).

The difficulties continued into the next round of site selection, as evident in the report in the Spring 1982 *Newsletter*:

Though the exact location of the 1983 ASAO Annual Meeting is presently unknown, it was decided that the meeting would take place on the West Coast during the customary time (probably late February). It is hoped that the choice of location will be finalized in time for publication in the Summer *Newsletter*.

Related to the issue of the 1983 meeting is consideration of Hawaii as the site. Since Hawaii is receiving serious consideration it has been requested that

potential session organizers and others with suggestions for activities to be held in connection with a Hawaii meeting please contact Geoff White (*ASAO Newsletter* #42: 1–2)

And the uncertainty continued in the Summer 1982 *Newsletter*:

The exact location of the 1983 ASAO Annual Meeting site has not yet been determined. Vern Carroll, the Annual Meetings Coordinator, is still working on finalizing the site location and the program as well. More information on the meeting site will be highlighted in the fall *Newsletter*. Consequently, there will not be a complete report on the total program in this edition of the *Newsletter*. However, since the meeting arrangements have not yet been finalized, all members who wish to organize a session should contact Vern Carroll immediately. (*ASAO Newsletter* #43: 2)

The Fall 1982 *Newsletter* announced a surprising selection, far from any ocean but only seven miles from my family farm in southwestern Indiana, where I had returned to live in 1981.

The New Harmony Inn, New Harmony, Indiana, has been selected as the site of the 12th ASAO Annual Meeting. The dates for the meeting are Wednesday, March 9 through Saturday, March 13 (Vern requests that members try to stay through Sunday noon for maximum participation). New Harmony, located in the southeastern corner of Indiana, is a small town of approximately 950 people situated on the banks of the Wabash River. (*ASAO Newsletter* #44: 1).

Part of the charm of New Harmony is that it was founded by German Pietists who came from Harmonie, Pennsylvania, bought 20,000 acres where the Wabash feeds into the Ohio River, and proceeded to build their version of a utopian Christian community. Ten years later they sold the town to Robert Owen, a British industrialist who wanted to found a utopian community built on scientific principles. Eventually, it transitioned into small-town Indiana (where I got kicked out of the Yellow Tavern in 1962 for being underage). But none of this has anything to do with Oceania—and it was not ideal. In the *Newsletter*, Carroll went on to note that the New Harmony Inn had only forty-five rooms, the Evansville airport was not a major hub, and, perhaps worst of all, there would be no coffee breaks during the sessions (*ASAO Newsletter* #44: 2–3). But surprisingly, in 1986, ASAO came back to New Harmony a second time.

In the following issue of the *Newsletter*, Carroll begged for feedback concerning site selection while at the same time pumping up New Harmony as a meeting site.

If anyone has a contribution to make on this score, the time to act is *now*. Send me your thoughts, and they will be taken into consideration. By the time the meetings begin, we will have firmly established our policies, in great detail, for the foreseeable future. Any second thoughts on the rotational policy ... ? Any thoughts on a meeting in Hawaii in 1984 ... ? Any thoughts on the structure of our meetings ...? Any particular sites you would like to recommend?

On New Harmony - We have a spectacular conference site—both for serious intellectual work *and* for the sort of conviviality for which we have become famous: There will be a “cash bar,” during the hours indicated on the Program, in a lovely large room which we have the exclusive use of. Beer and wine will cost \$1.50, and mixed drinks will cost \$2.25. Please patronize this facility, and do not subvert it by bootlegging your own refreshments. We hope also that—since we have this facility—members will not feel the need of holding parties in their rooms. (*ASAO Newsletter #45* [Winter 1983]: 2)

In the Spring 1983 *Newsletter*, Carroll lived up to his nom de plume, “Meeting Czar”:

Our next annual meeting will be held at the Sheraton-Molokai Resort, on the island of Molokai, Hawaii. The meetings will begin on Tuesday, February 18th ... and end on Saturday, March 3rd. ... As usual, the Board and the Officers will meet on the day preceding [*sic*] the meetings. ... Please make your travel plans now to avoid disappointment, and to get the best deal.

In the next *Newsletter* we shall begin a column of typical rates, to which all who have any information at all on air fares are asked to contribute. ...

It is imperative that you make your reservations *now*. The space reserved for us will be reevaluated periodically in the light of the number of reservations received, and we will lose rooms if the numbers of reservations are relatively low. ... the Sheraton bureaucracy is firm in its little policies (which are the international standard in the convention business).

It will not be possible to sign up for group meals once you arrive (or after the cut-off date for reservations). There can be no exceptions to this rule (so don't even bother to make a special plea!).

There are no other facilities within walking distance (or, for that matter, within easy driving distance). ... There will be no scheduled coffee breaks, so bring a thermos and load up on what you need at the coffee shop. (*ASAO Newsletter #46*: 3–4)

While site selection was getting increasingly complex, the 1985 meeting was finally held in the Pacific. The meeting on Moloka‘i, the first one in Hawai‘i, turned out to be the largest to date.

Vern Carroll, Annual Meeting Coordinator, has submitted the following:

Over 130 persons (and a dozen or so children) attended the meetings on Molokai, making this the biggest meeting ever!!

Next year, in consideration of our impoverished brethren in the Northeast, we will meet in a lovely historic seaport, where we can reasonably hope for nice weather. We expect to work out some special arrangements with the Peabody Museum—more details later.

The search has begun for a suitable site for our 1986 meetings. These will be held, following our usual rotational policy, in the “Midwest” (defined for present purposes, as anywhere that is at least 500 miles from a coast). (*ASAO Newsletter* #50 [Spring 1984]: 16)

In the same *Newsletter*, the first meeting in the Northeast was announced:

The 1985 meetings will be held March 6–March 10 at the Hawthorne Inn, Salem, Massachusetts, an historic New England town and home of the Peabody Museum (*ASAO Newsletter* #50: 17)

After that meeting in the Northeast, the “Meeting Czar” resigned.

Congratulations are also in order for Susan Pflanz-Cook who has been appointed by the Board to take over the position of Annual Meetings Coordinator left vacant by the resignation of Vern Carroll. Suzy is already involved in negotiating the New Harmony site and checking a west coast site for 1987. ...

On behalf of the Association membership, I would like to offer a special vote of thanks to Vern Carroll for the fine job he has done in ensuring the smooth running of the Annual meetings over the years. Few of us appreciate the amount of background work and delicate negotiating that goes into the choice of a meetings site. (*ASAO Newsletter* #55 [Summer 1985]: 1)

However, as Carroll stepped down, he offered the threat of some 1986 meeting attendees being stuck in a hotel in my hometown: Mt. Vernon, Indiana.

The annual meeting of the Board of Directors and Officers will be held at the New Harmony Inn on March 4, 1986. Sessions will be scheduled March 5 through March 8 with the Final Plenary Session to be held on the morning of March 9, 1986. ...

Early reservations are recommended as we will almost certainly have some overflow to the Four Seasons in Mt. Vernon some 15 miles away. (*ASAO Newsletter* #55: 3)

With the appointment of Susan Pflanz-Cook, the drama seemed to dissipate. She served ably as Site Coordinator for ten years (1985–1994). As can be seen in her understated reports (sometimes just a sentence or two), ASAO members could turn their attention to the sessions themselves and not have to worry about site selection. Her reports reveal that she took the site selection criteria seriously, as they are peppered with words and phrases like “formal and informal,” “bars and restaurants within walking distance,” “affordable,” “a variety of meeting rooms,” “historic,” and “scenic.” No wonder she later was called “our ever-vigilant Annual Meetings Coordinator” (*ASAO Newsletter* #66 [Spring 1988]: 7).

In 1988, the ASAO Bylaws were revised, listing for the first time an officer called the Annual Meetings Coordinator.

Section 6b. Annual Meetings Coordinator. The Annual Meetings Coordinator, in consultation with the Chair of the Board and following guidelines established by the Board, shall be responsible for the selection of sites suitable for annual meetings. The Annual Meetings Coordinator is responsible for negotiating terms and conditions with the management of these establishments, providing the *Newsletter* Editor with the copy members need to plan their attendance, including registration forms, and making whatever arrangements with the local establishment that are necessary before, during, and after the annual meetings. Service in this office shall qualify the person so appointed for the status of Fellow. (*ASAO Newsletter* #67 [Summer 1988]: 16–17)

### **ASAO Site Selection in the 1990s**

A survey about dates for a 1990 meeting in Hawai‘i suggested that the first two weeks in February were preferred, particularly by members from Australia and New Zealand due to their academic schedules (*ASAO Newsletter* #68 [Fall 1988]: 3). However, February was a “peak season” for Hawai‘i hotels, so negotiations eventually led to the announcement that “the 1990

Annual Meeting of ASAO will be held on March 21–25 at the Coco Palms Resort on the island of Kaua‘i” (*ASAO Newsletter* #70 [Summer 1989]: 2). Hawai‘i proved a draw again, as the largest meeting yet was held in 1990, with 191 registrants at the hotel (*ASAO Newsletter* #73 [Winter 1990]: 3).

The next meeting, in Victoria, British Columbia, was also held in March; however, the 1992 meeting was held in February in New Orleans. The 1993 meeting moved back to the March date because the site was Hawai‘i—the Big Island, this time. The report for this meeting contains the first mention of a written contract being negotiated, though this increasingly became the case.

Suzy Pflanz-Cook, our ASAO Site Selector, has signed a contract with the King Kamehameha Kona Beach Hotel on the Big Island of Hawai‘i for the 1993 Annual Meeting from Wednesday, March 24, through Sunday, March 28, 1993. (*ASAO Newsletter* #82 [July 1992]: 2)

In 1994, Pflanz-Cook shared duties with her successor, Terry Aihoshi, searching for an East Coast site for a meeting to be held in February 1995 (*ASAO Newsletter* #88 [April 1994]: 2). By 1996, Hawai‘i had become a regular in the rotation: West Coast, East Coast, Hawai‘i. The April 1995 *Newsletter* announcement also contained another mile marker: the beginning of email for contacting the Site Coordinator (*ASAO Newsletter* #91: 2).

In July 1997, Aihoshi stepped down and the search was on for a new Site Coordinator. By the end of the year, the Board was announcing the position. They began with this plea: “We *urgently* need a new Site Coordinator,” and added a carrot: “Service as a Site Coordinator qualifies a person for the status of ASAO Fellow” (*ASAO Newsletter* #99 [December 1997]: 3). If that was not enough, they held out a promise of a “small budget” to help defray expenses. In 1998, Dorothy and David Counts took up the offer but served only two years in the position (1998–1999). They did publish a list of criteria in the April 1998 *Newsletter*, including a new one: whether a local population of Pacific Islanders was present nearby who might be interested

in attending and participating in the meetings (*ASAO Newsletter* #100: 3). So, later that year, the same “urgent” appeal for a replacement appeared (*ASAO Newsletter* #101 [September 1998]: 4).

The December 1998 *Newsletter* reported membership numbers for the years 1996–1998, broken down by geographical area. On average, 70% of ASAO members were from the United States (including Hawai‘i, which represented about 10% of members) and 6% from Canada, giving North America 76% of the membership. Europe boasted 10%, while Australia and the Pacific Islands each provided 5% of the members with New Zealand providing 3%—a total of 13% for the Pacific area (*ASAO Newsletter* #102: 21). This geographical breakdown may provide some insight into member preferences re meeting locations, including divergent views (mentioned in *ASAO Newsletter* #97 [April 1997]: 2) about whether ASAO should try to hold a meeting in the Pacific beyond Hawai‘i. Note that a later report on membership and meeting attendance 1997–2009 based on residence revealed similar patterns: over this twenty-three-year period, an average of 72% of members, and 69% of meeting attendees, resided in North America (see appendix 1 in Jan Rensel’s paper on the origins of the Pacific Islands Scholars Fund). As would be seen, there were precipitous drops in the numbers of US and Canadian meeting registrants when ASAO meetings were held in New Zealand or Australia (*ASAO Newsletter* #136 [April 2010]: 23–26).

At the 1999 meeting, Judy Flores was named as Site Coordinator (*ASAO Newsletter* #103 [April 1999]: 2). This was to prove a difficult term of service for her since she lived on Guam. The logistics of mail, telephone, and even email made the job even more difficult. This was to prove true again in a later appointment and leads me to conclude that the Board should think twice before appointing someone who does not live in the United States or Canada as Site Coordinator.

## **ASAO Site Selection in the 2000s**

Perhaps to increase participation by Pacific Islanders and anthropologists living in the Australia-Pacific region, the Board chose Auckland, New Zealand, as the site of the 2002 meeting. The University of Auckland Conference Center was the meeting site, with accommodation available at the nearby Carlton Hotel or at O'Rorke Hall, a university dorm offering single rooms. The announcement noted that:

We expect a high level of participation from Pacific scholars from around the region and from Auckland. The city of Auckland is unofficially known as the capital of Polynesia. The largest Polynesian population in the world lives here and because there is a lot to see and do, conference participants are encouraged to consider staying a little longer. (*ASAO Newsletter* #109 [April 2001]: 2)

While it may have been in operation for a while, the announcement also touted the new ASAO website as a location for registration.

All you ever wanted to know about Auckland and the meetings will be posted on the ASAO website as soon as everything is finalised. Keep an eye out for our conference webpage. Details will also be published in the September and December ASAO Newsletters.

In the meantime, you can see <[www.aucklandnz.com](http://www.aucklandnz.com)> for a variety of Auckland maps and links to other information about the city; and for a downloadable pdf-format map of the University of Auckland campus (showing the Conference Centre), see <<http://www.geog.auckland.ac.nz/public/maps/city.pdf>> (*ASAO Newsletter* #109: 2)

As in all site development, Local Site Coordinators, in this case Cluny Macpherson and Karen Nero, played an important role.

For the first time, ironically given the political interests of ASAO, the indigenous owners were invited to play the role of hosts welcoming the anthropologists as guests. We were privileged to be welcomed by Maori leaders with appropriate chants. Being a guest included contributing to the university marae. The ASAO meeting in Auckland was considered a success,

with 149 in attendance, including record numbers from Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Islands but a dramatic drop in those coming from the United States (*ASAO Newsletter* #112 [April 2002]: 25).

After another meeting in Vancouver in 2003, ASAO ventured into the Northeast again with the 2004 meeting at Salem, Massachusetts. While this location offered a maritime and historic setting, some things were changing in the hotel meeting world.

This year's meeting expenses will be a great deal higher than ASAO meetings over the past several years, because we have to pay for meeting room rental, as well as the usual AV equipment rental, morning and afternoon refreshments breaks ... etc. (*ASAO Newsletter* #116 [September 2003]: 2)

Concerns about rising costs of hotels with additional fees for rooms and equipment weighed heavily on the next year's site selection process.

After extended but ultimately unsuccessful negotiations with one Waikiki hotel and close examination of several other Honolulu possibilities, the Board decided that the O'ahu options were far too expensive for the association, its individual members, or both. Jan Rensel followed up with research on alternatives suggested by Judy Flores, resulting in a unanimous choice of the Radisson Kaua'i Beach Resort, just outside of Lihu'e. (*ASAO Newsletter* #118 [April 2004]: 3)

This put more pressure on the Site Coordinator's, as well as the local arrangement person's, ability to negotiate. Sometimes a guarantee of a minimal guest room block can be exchanged for a reduction in meeting room fees. Apparently, that is what happened behind this report: "The really great news is that the hotel has offered to waive charges for ASAO's use of their meeting rooms, thereby allowing us to keep our conference registration fees low" (*ASAO Newsletter* #118: 7).

At the 2006 meeting in San Diego, Judy Flores sent in her resignation. Trying to arrange things from Guam had become too difficult (Guam is in tomorrow; as people awake there, the US Mainland is closing up shop). The San Diego site was not ideal: a hotel far from the beach

and surrounded by freeways and hills. While the hotel had two restaurants, the concept of “walking distance” to others was stretched, as we had to cross over a freeway to the Mission Valley shopping center, which featured a few restaurants and a trolley stop for other venues in San Diego.

The April 2006 *Newsletter* had no report about the meeting site for 2007, nor did it include an announcement about Flores’s resignation. However, in the list of officers, Michael Rynkiewich was listed as the Site Coordinator (*ASAO Newsletter* #124: 32). It was time to reorganize and move on.

The September 2006 *Newsletter* began with this announcement by the Chair, Eric Silverman:

Over the past months, many members have tireless[ly] worked to hone plans for the upcoming meeting in Charlottesville, VA, USA, on February 20-24 at the Omni Charlottesville Hotel. Many folks have displayed exceptional dedication and effort in this endeavor, and they must be celebrated. They include Kathy Creely (our Treasurer), Judy Flores (former Site Coordinator), Roger Lohmann (Program Coordinator), Ira Bashkow (Site Coordinator ex officio), Lamont Lindstrom (Distinguished Lecture unofficial committee chair), Michael Rynkiewich (Site Coordinator), and Keith Chambers (PISF Committee Chair), and of course Jan Rensel, whose expertise continues to be inadequately subsumed under any one title (although it is currently Archivist). Bradd Shore has kindly accepted our invitation to deliver the Distinguished Lecture. I am sure that the program will prove exciting. (*ASAO Newsletter* #125: 2)

The 2007 meeting in Charlottesville was not on the coast, but it was definitely a historic site with its Jeffersonian (not to mention Madison and Monroe) connections, as well as the University of Virginia. And although it was on the East Coast, many Pacific Islands scholars attended and participated, due in part to seven travel grants provided through ASAO’s Pacific Islands Scholars Fund (*ASAO Newsletter* #127 [April 2007]: 2–3).

At the Charlottesville meeting I presented the first proposal for a meeting in Australia, which was accepted:

The Board approved the Australian National University at Canberra as the site for the 2008 meeting. This is the year for our meeting in the Pacific. The Department of Anthropology, the Research School of Pacific and Asia Studies, and the newly-formed College of Asia and the Pacific are all supportive of the plan. The meeting will be held on February 12–16, 2008. ASAO members may stay on campus at University House or at nearby hotels, particularly Rydges Hotel, which is a ten-minute walk away. Sessions will be held in the Coombs Building where there is full electronic support. There are a variety of museums and art galleries both on campus and nearby in Canberra. (*ASAO Newsletter* #127 [April 2007]: 24–25)

I worked closely with Mark Mosko, Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the Australian National University, to arrange lodging and meals. The department hosted the meeting, along with the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. Since the major airport is in Sydney, not Canberra, there were a lot of details that had to be worked out to get people to and from the meeting. I also specifically posted a special note about applying for visas, reminding people that “US citizens do need to apply for a visa to visit Australia! There is an electronic option (ETA) as well as a regular tourist visa. Apparently this can be done online or may be handled by airlines or travel agents, but it does need to be taken care ahead of time” (*ASAO Newsletter* #129 [December 2007]: 4).

Ironically, my wife and I were thwarted on a Saturday afternoon at the St. Louis airport where an electronic visa was denied because our valid US passports had been issued (renewed) at the US Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Thus, the Site Coordinator missed the meeting.

Nonetheless, the Canberra meeting was a success: “Near record numbers of conference participants (177 registered attendees) made this the third-most highly attended ASAO Annual Meeting in the past ten years. Our sincere thanks to Mark Mosko and The Australian National University for serving as our hosts” (*ASAO Newsletter* #130 [April 2008]: 21).

During 2008, the Chair, Dan Jorgenson, conducted an online survey of members' views about meeting site selection. The survey revealed that most (75%) of the members agreed with the current site rotation practice. While most members preferred a warm location, most also preferred to have air-conditioning. Members reminded the Board and Site Coordinator that costs were still an issue. There was support for considering anything east of the Rockies as "East Coast," but the possibility of having a meeting on the Pacific coast of Mexico or in Europe was more polarizing (*ASAO Newsletter* #132 [December 2008]: 2).

The 2009 meeting was held in Santa Cruz, California, and that presented its own logistical issues. Again, the main airport was miles away, and I was busy arranging mass transportation (buses, vans, and limos) to and from San Jose (see *ASAO Newsletter* #131 [September 2008]: 3). In this era, there was a growing sense of cooperation between the Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Program Coordinator, and Site Coordinator, as evidenced by repeated notes of appreciation in the newsletters. For example: "Finally, I am grateful to Kathy Creely, Mike Rynkiewich, and Mary McCutcheon for their efforts in securing local arrangements for the meeting. Roger Lohmann, Former Program Coordinator" (*ASAO Newsletter* #133 [April 2009]: 18–19). This kind of team effort became critical at the next meeting in Alexandria, Virginia.

### **ASAO Site Selection in the 2010s**

Hopes were high for the Alexandria meeting that was to be held at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Old Town February 9–13, 2010. The new Board Chair (Toon van Meijl, who, I might note, was from Europe) mused, "Although it is often mentioned that our meetings convened on the US East

Coast tend to attract fewer members, it looks as though the next conference is going to disprove this piece of wisdom (*ASAO Newsletter* #135 [December 2009]: 2).

But the Chair did not count on “Snowmageddon,” a Category 3 nor’easter that hit on February 5th and 6th, spreading two to three feet of snow across the eastern United States. After the first round of snow, I flew out of St. Louis on a direct flight to Washington DC on Tuesday the 9th, and the weather was fine, deluding many of us into thinking that the worst was over. However, that evening and the next day, another two feet of snow was dumped on the mid-Atlantic states, prompting the nickname “Snoverkill.” Transportation facilities that were just digging out were buried again. Any ASAO member traveling from the Pacific or West Coast was diverted or stranded. Ironically, members flying in from Europe arrived without much trouble, and so it was a European-dominated meeting.

This event tested the skills and degree of cooperation between Chair, Site Coordinator, Membership Secretary, Treasurer, and Program Coordinator. We rescheduled sessions and meeting rooms, scrapped the new plan as the blizzard went on, and rescheduled again. The hotel, much to the management’s credit, declared force majeure and thus did not hold us accountable for our contract for lodging rooms, meeting rooms, or catering. Here is the Program Coordinator, Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi, reporting on the sessions:

Fortunately, with the help of Site Coordinator Mike Rynkiewich and then Membership Chair Kathy Creely—along with numerous email communications from those on their way and advice from members who had already made it to the hotel—I was able to restructure the program schedule twice, thereby allowing the meeting to go on. While a few sessions were completely cancelled, most were held all day or for a morning or afternoon on Friday and Saturday. (*ASAO Newsletter* #136 [April 2010]: 19)

Here is an example of what happened to the sessions.

Diaspora, Identity and Incorporation  
Organizers: Alan Howard, Jan Rensel, and Michael Lieber

This was the fourth year that this session met. We anticipated 15 participants (including the session organizers) presenting 11 papers and one discussant. In the first half of the morning part of the session, we had only the Discussant Mike Rynkiewich who led the meeting and four participants (Wolfgang Kempf, Susanne Kuehling, Manuel Rauchholz and Micah Van der Ryn). At break, we added two more (Ping-Ann Addo and Mike Lieber), and in the afternoon we added one more (Laurence Carucci). So, in the end we had the Discussant leading the session, and 7 out of the 15 anticipated participants (missing were Alan Howard, Jan Rensel, Dionne Fonoti, Suzanne Falgout, Wilys Peter, Rosita Peter and Mike Borong, and finally, Sela Panapasa who did not submit a paper). (*ASAO Newsletter #136: 8*)

Here is the Chair's report after the meeting:

While the onset of spring has made a distant memory of the immense snow that disrupted our meeting in Old Town Alexandria, VA, I wanted to thank all of you who braved the weather and persisted in coming, and to apologize to those of you whose trip was cancelled or otherwise disrupted. Despite these problems, I am pleased to report that our Alexandria meeting, though significantly smaller, was full of productive sessions and informal exchanges. To this end, I would like to thank all of the Board members and Officers who helped to make the conference run. (*ASAO Newsletter #136: 2*)

During the meeting, the Board did decide not to chance Northeastern sites again. No surprise there. The next meeting was held in Waikīkī, much to everyone's pleasure.

The next issue to arise was the matter of the ecological impact of site selection. Paige West, later to be elected Chair of the Board at ASAO, did the underlying groundwork for this consideration for the AAA. Board members Joshua Bell, Elfriede Hermann, and Dan Jorgenson wrote the ASAO proposal. Site location is central to reducing the "carbon footprint" of the meetings. To do that we could select sites near major airports (to reduce the number of flights and dependence on ground transportation); be upfront in our negotiations with hotels and conference centers about our concerns for the environment (including questioning whether they recycle, offer self-limiting towel and linen service, avoid using bottled water, and provide china cups rather than paper cups for coffee, tea, and other drinks); consider permitting video

conferencing for some members; provide meeting registrants with a list of organizations (including airlines and governments) offering carbon offset programs on the ASAO website; and finally, avoid printing or, if necessary, print on 100% recycled paper (*ASAO Newsletter* #137 [September 2010]: 3–4).

The 2011 meeting was both warm and near a major airport with public transportation connections. Although Waikīkī had been avoided in the past as “too touristy” and “full of distractions,” in fact the meeting was well attended and the sessions were successful. However, some other new issues emerged. The hotel had a number of “additional” charges, for example, for plugging in computers in session rooms and for screens for projection (the use of room walls was prohibited). These issues became negotiating points for future site selection, beginning with the Portland meeting.

In Portland, the Benson Hotel already had “sustainability and green policies and practices” (*ASAO Newsletter* #140 [September 2011]: 3). The Portland meeting was marked by a particularly gracious hotel staff who responded quickly to our concerns. For example, the location of our first coffee break was too constricted, but by the afternoon break the staff had secured another more spacious location.

The Chair, Edvard Hviding, waxed poetic:

It is no secret that the ASAO’s gathering in Portland was a particularly successful one, with such a wide range of fertile sessions and with continuous, inspiring dialogues among colleagues and friends in the warm ambience of the Benson Hotel, in the salty atmosphere of the oyster bars, and in the general welcoming air of a real, working city where spring seemed about to arrive already then. The choice of the hotel is something for which we are all grateful to site coordinator Mike Rynkiewich. Indeed, this meeting was a particular one with reference to our association’s gratitude also to the hotel itself and to its staff, for such a hospitable environment conducive to the cultivation of scholarship, friendship and the good life. (*ASAO Newsletter* #142 [April 2012]: 2)

I had tried to submit my resignation earlier, but the Board had been unable to find a replacement. One prospect, a European who made it to the snow-bound 2010 meeting in Alexandria, declined in part because he foresaw the difficulty of exploring and negotiating for sites from Europe. The Chair, Roger Lohmann, posted the help-wanted ad in the December 2011 *Newsletter*.

Speaking of noble and retiring ASAO officers, we need YOU to be ASAO's next site coordinator. Mike Rynkiewicz, who has continued to serve well beyond the time he wished to step down, has recently retired, and will therefore be unable to continue as site coordinator. This position involves negotiating with hotels in potential future meeting locales. The duties leave one free most of the time, and the skills learned are enriching. Each of us who enjoys ASAO meetings owes it to Mike to find—or better yet to be—the person who will step forward and replace him as ASAO's new Site Coordinator. You will enjoy Mike's tutelage for coming year. Please contact him ... if you might like to serve. (*ASAO Newsletter* #141: 2)

At the 2013 meeting in San Antonio, after serving eight years in the position, I began the transition to my successor, Ryan Schram. I kept developing arrangements for the 2014 meeting in Hawai'i, while Schram began work developing two proposals for the 2015 meeting. The new Chair, Paige West, recorded the transition:

The meetings were truly fantastic so I want to begin by thanking everyone who was involved in planning and organizing them. Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi and Mike Rynkiewicz, Program Coordinator and Site Coordinator, deserve special thanks. As do Jamon Halvaksz and Jerry Jacka, our on site members who helped Laura and Mike with much of the pre-meeting logistical work. Both Laura and Mike will step down from their positions with ASAO this year. They have both worked incredibly hard for the organization and we owe them many thanks. Alex Mawyer has agreed to take over as Program Coordinator and Ryan Schram has agreed to take over as Site Coordinator. Mike's last work for the ASAO has been to work with the King Kamehameha Hotel in Kona, Hawai'i, to organize the 2014 meetings. (*ASAO Newsletter* #145 [April 2013]: 1)

Indeed, getting the criteria straight, adding new criteria as needed, increasing cooperation between officers, now caps a long history of site selection for ASAO. Perhaps new Chair Lisa Uperesa said it best:

As our past chair, Paige West, noted in her first chair's letter last year, the world of scholarship is indeed changing. Much of our work with Pacific communities bring us into conversation with people who are not anthropologists, and these dialogues and collaborations invigorate some of the most interesting work in the region. I was pleased to see many colleagues and community members in Kona who are not anthropologists participate in the meetings. I was also pleased to hear from anthropology colleagues who have been away from ASAO meetings for some time, who expressed their excitement at the intellectually and socially vibrant atmosphere of the Kona meetings. *Several people shared with different board members their delight that the meetings get better each year.* This would not be possible without the thoughtful commitment of the membership, officers, and board members who have worked diligently to make ASAO a welcoming and productive place for all our colleagues. (*ASAO Newsletter #148 [April 2014]: 3, italics mine*).

After two years, Ryan Schram resigned as Site Coordinator, or actually switched offices with Jamon Halvaksz, who had been *Newsletter* editor. Schram was located in Australia, Halvaksz in San Antonio, perhaps confirming my observation that the job of Site Coordinator is made even more difficult when someone outside the United States is asked to do the tedious work of discovery and negotiation.

In February 2016, because of a diversity of opinion that was expressed during the ASAO closing plenary, ASAO Secretary Jerry Jacka set up an online survey to (a) get a sense of how many people would attend a meeting in Tahiti vs. Hawai'i (Honolulu or Kauai) and (b) to get feedback about the likelihood of attendance if future meetings were held in other possible sites. The survey (which was also inadvertently made available to nonmembers via ASAONET) showed that more than 55% of respondents would not go to Tahiti if the meeting was held there (compared to 15–22% of respondents saying they wouldn't go to the Hawai'i locations), so the board decided to hold the 2017 meeting on Kauai.

Of the 13 other proposed locations (mostly large cities in the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, plus Guam and Cabo San Lucas in Mexico), the most popular were Seattle, Vancouver BC, and San Francisco (with more than 80% of respondents saying they'd be likely

to attend meetings held in those locations) and the least popular were Guam and Cabo San Lucas (with less than 50% of respondents saying they'd be likely to attend meetings in either of those places). Respondents were also given an opportunity to suggest other meeting locations; of the 186 survey respondents, 96 made suggestions, including more than sixty different places. Most were suggested by just 1 person, although 31 respondents suggested Fiji and 18 Sāmoa. It might be interesting to include Fiji and Sāmoa, at least, in a follow-up survey again allowing people to indicate the likelihood of their attending a meeting in those places. And prior to such a survey it might be useful to explore available meeting facilities, accommodations, and air routes—and tap the experience of other international academic organizations that have held their meetings in either Fiji or Sāmoa.

## **Conclusions**

In anthropology, we should all be familiar with what I will call “the Theory of Structural Contradictions.” I used it in a paper for my first ASAO symposium on Political Development in Micronesia (chaired by Dan Hughes and Sherwood Lingenfelter at the 1971 AAA meetings; *ASAO Newsletter* #8 [Summer 1971]: 5). I argued that Marshallese rules for succession to chieftainship each contained a logic that clashed with other rules—not a novel idea. But the result is that people have to negotiate the rules, bend the rules, and emphasize one rule while downplaying another, in order to support their candidate for leader. One would hope that the dialectic leads to the best outcome, but that is questionable even in larger cultures (note: this was written on November 9, 2016, the day after the US elections).

In anthropology, we also should all be familiar with the importance of place and thus of site selection. Culturally, all peoples tend to differentiate between sacred sites, contested sites,

neutral sites, and so on. In functional terms, for example, we talk about “the peace in the marketplace.” Most ASAO meeting sites have been congruent with some guidelines while being weak on others precisely because it is impossible to satisfy one rule without bending another. There is no perfect site.

Many of these issues resurface perennially in an ASAONET discussion thread such as that of September 5–12, 2016. Concerns about affordability look different from the perspective of someone living in France, or Tahiti, or Chicago. Affordability is a function of distance and time as much as it is about hotel and meal expenses. Further, affordability affects the organization itself, for, as several pointed out, a couple of years in the red would threaten the very existence of ASAO. Eric Silverman noted a persistent contradiction: The meetings are held in February or March—that is wintertime in the Northern Hemisphere and thus warm-weather sites are always at a premium. Jacqueline Leckie reminded us of the importance of consistency: at least some of our sessions are based on a three-year cycle, and so site decisions should be made such that the same people are able to attend three years in a row no matter what the venue. Finally, there were as many plugs there for a meeting in Apia, Sāmoa, as there had been in the early days for Suva, Fiji. Several old hands reminded the discussants about the faithfulness of the Board in wrestling with these issues on a recurring basis.

Going on from here, the membership and Board might keep in mind the following desirable qualities when selecting annual meeting sites:

1. Accessible: easy to get to and at a good season of year for scholars (with steady incomes) and students, whether from the Pacific Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, or Europe, or from either the East Coast or the West Coast of North America.
2. Inclusive: find sites, preferably in the Pacific Islands, that are more likely to be attractive to Pacific Islanders and thus are consistent with our focus on Oceania.

3. Affordable: low costs for hotel sleeping rooms, airfare, and meals; as well as for catering and for renting meeting rooms (usually these last two costs are in inverse proportion, when one goes up the other goes down).
4. Affable: an atmosphere that fosters congeniality; near the beach, warm, relaxing, yet within walking distance of other bars, restaurants, and even hotels.
5. Accommodating: enough sleeping rooms to accommodate 120 to 160 people; enough meeting rooms for multiple concurrent meetings (at present, at minimum, two large rooms (50) and three medium rooms (30); a generous space for morning and afternoon breaks, as well as dining rooms and catering service for luncheon meetings, a space for book displays, and, finally, a very large room for plenary sessions and lectures (160).
6. Eco-friendly: air routes and hotels that allow attendees to leave the smallest carbon footprint.
7. Synergistic: It should all work together so that people attend annual meetings no matter where they are held because our “theory of sessions” is that the same people should meet for three consecutive years to produce publishable articles and books.