

Field Museum of Natural History

Founded by Marshall Field, 1893

Roosevelt Road and Field Drive, Chicago

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FIELD MUSEUM NEWS

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Field Museum is open every day of the year (except Christmas and New Year's Day) during the hours indicated below:

November, December, January, February	9 A.M. to 4 P.M.
March, April, September, October	9 A.M. to 5 P.M.
May, June, July, August	9 A.M. to 6 P.M.

Admission is free to Members on all days. Other adults are admitted free on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays; non-members pay 25 cents on other days. Children are admitted free on all days. Students and faculty members of educational institutions are admitted free any day upon presentation of credentials.

The Museum's natural history Library is open for reference daily except Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

Traveling exhibits are circulated in the schools of Chicago by the N. W. Harris Public School Extension Department of the Museum.

Lectures for schools, and special entertainments and tours for children at the Museum, are provided by the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation for Public School and Children's Lectures.

Announcements of free illustrated lectures for the public, and special lectures for Members of the Museum, will appear in FIELD MUSEUM NEWS.

A cafeteria in the Museum serves visitors. Rooms are provided for those bringing their lunches.

Chicago Motor Coach Company No. 26 buses go direct to the Museum.

Members are requested to inform the Museum promptly of changes of address.

MEMBERSHIP IN FIELD MUSEUM

Field Museum has several classes of Members. Benefactors give or devise \$100,000 or more. Contributors give or devise \$1,000 to \$100,000. Life Members give \$500; Non-Resident Life and Associate Members pay \$100; Non-Resident Associate Members pay \$50. All the above classes are exempt from dues. Sustaining Members contribute \$25 annually. After six years they become Associate Members. Annual Members contribute \$10 annually. Other memberships are Corporate, Honorary, Patron, and Corresponding, additions under these classifications being made by special action of the Board of Trustees.

Each Member, in all classes, is entitled to free admission to the Museum for himself, his family and house guests, and to two reserved seats for Museum lectures provided for Members. Subscription to FIELD MUSEUM NEWS is included with all memberships. The courtesies of every museum of note in the United States and Canada are extended to all Members of Field Museum. A Member may give his personal card to non-residents of Chicago, upon presentation of which they will be admitted to the Museum without charge. Further information about memberships will be sent on request.

BEQUESTS AND ENDOWMENTS

Bequests to Field Museum of Natural History may be made in securities, money, books or collections. They may, if desired, take the form of a memorial to a person or cause, named by the giver.

Contributions made within the taxable year not exceeding 15 per cent of the taxpayer's net income are allowable as deductions in computing net income for federal income tax purposes.

Endowments may be made to the Museum with the provision that an annuity be paid to the patron for life. These annuities are guaranteed against fluctuation in amount, and may reduce federal income taxes.

THE ORIGIN OF CORN

By B. E. DAHLGREN

Chief Curator, Department of Botany

The corn plant, as known in cultivation, has never been found in the wild state. Its place of origin has long remained a subject for speculation. Podcorn, in which each kernel has a separate small husk, occasionally appears spontaneously in northern cornfields and is often spoken of as a reversion. Nevertheless it is generally denied that it has anything to do with the ancestral form, as has been suggested by some botanists.

At the time of the discovery of America, corn was domesticated in many separate areas from what is now Argentina to Canada. Columbus saw it in Cuba. Charred corn has been discovered in the ancient mounds of the middle western Mound Builders. Dried corn is preserved in prehistoric pueblos of the southwest and in ancient tombs of Peru. It was evidently of great importance as food in many places, especially among the most advanced indigenes who had come to depend for sustenance on agriculture rather than hunting animals or collecting miscellaneous wild fruits and roots.

In the areas inhabited by the agricultural Incas of Peru, and the Aztecs and Mayas of southern Mexico and Guatemala, one would most naturally search for some sign of the origin of corn or the beginnings of its cultivation. Both these areas have their advocates, but Nicaragua and Paraguay have also been suggested.

At present most of those especially interested in the question, and qualified to judge, seem to accord in ascribing the origin of corn to southern Mexico. In the Mexican highlands and in adjacent Guatemala is found the related teosinte, "the most corn-like of all wild grasses," growing as a tall weed in corn fields and hybridizing naturally with the planted corn.

The hypothesis of a Mexican-Guatemalan origin has recently been emphasized on that basis by the well-known Russian botanist, Dr. N. I. Vavilov, whose brilliant work on the history of Old World cultivated plants gives his opinions great weight. This hypothesis appeals particularly to students of the prehistoric remains which litter the ground in southern Mexico and adjacent Maya regions. It furnishes a simple, ready-made explanation of how the pre-Columbian civilizations, to which the archaeological material bears witness, were made possible through the convenient presence of an indispensable food plant. The Mexican-Guatemalan theory is thus attractive, seems plausible, and may prove correct in part. However, as it rests on several assumptions, chief of which concerns the nature and significance of teosinte, it is unsatisfactory in other respects and at best only provisional.

The other area with a strong claim to consideration as the original home of cultivated corn is Peru. There corn is the staff of life of the present-day Indian population, as it must have been even before the days of the Incas.

Field Museum's botanical collections include excellent and characteristic specimens of corn from Peru, some of considerable antiquity, as well as fine examples of ancient pottery with corn decorations. These were recently studied by Mr. R. C. Mangelsdorf, of Texas Experimental Station, a diligent investigator of the subject, now working at Harvard Biological Laboratories. Mr. Mangelsdorf considers that the botanical and genetic evidence he has in hand points to the Peruvian area rather than the Mexican as the place of original domestication of the corn plant. As to the ancestor of this, he thinks

it likely to be represented by the now despised podcorn which the Indians found wild in South America as far south as Paraguay.

Mr. Mangelsdorf finds teosinte to be a natural hybrid of corn and the only other corn-like grass, *Tripsacum*, and that certain types of cultivated corn, such as the pointed popcorn, eight-rowed flint, and flour corn also show the influence of *Tripsacum*. Of these he finds no evidence in the Peruvian area and thinks it probable that they originated somewhat north of the teosinte area of southern Mexico, whence they have spread northward.

INDIANS OF CALIFORNIA RETAIN OLD CULTURE

By PAUL S. MARTIN

Chief Curator, Department of Anthropology

California, progressive in modern business and thought, is one of the most conservative places on the globe so far as the remnants of its aboriginal population of Indians is concerned. There are few places where basic ideas have, over many centuries, undergone so few changes, he states. As far back as 2,000 or 3,000 years the natives traded the same materials, ate the same food, and sewed skins and rush mats and coiled their baskets in the same ways as do their modern descendants today. The fundamentals of their cultures have remained immutable.

A collection representing these Indians is on exhibition in the Hall of North American Archaeology (Hall B). An implement known as a "slave-killer" is one of the few things representing a change in customs, since the modern California Indians would scarcely use it as their ancestors did and as its name implies. It is a double-pointed hatchet which in the old days was used by the chiefs to slay victims of sacrifice on occasions such as mourning over the death of an important personage. The points of this instrument were driven with a quick blow into the skull of the slave.

Also exhibited are tubular tobacco-pipes of a type believed to be the oldest ever used. From their shape and construction, archaeologists have been unable to deduce how they could possibly be used unless the smoker rested on his back and gazed skyward. It is believed that the shamans or medicine-men employed these for drawing evil spirits from the bodies of disease sufferers, in accordance with tribal superstitions.

The exhibit includes necklaces of abalone, clam and olivella shells; ornaments of limpet shell; shell fish hooks; shell dishes; whalebone wedges and chisels; bone implements for weaving sea grass into garments and mats; bone clubs for killing seals; whistles of bird-bone; pestles for crushing acorns, which were the people's principal food; various kinds of charms; some cog-wheel-like carved stones of unknown purpose, and many other problematical objects.

The aboriginal inhabitants of California, never developed a trace of native architecture. They used no metals, and made no axes or chisels of stone. They made no pottery except in restricted regions of the extreme south. They practised no agriculture. Shell and bone were the principal materials from which they fashioned their tools and other needed objects. Stone, when used, was principally for ornamental objects and for amulets employed as hunting and fishing charms. The permanence of this California culture is the most important single contribution to the history of civilization that studies of the California aborigines have yielded.



Martin, Paul S. 1938. "Indians of California Retain Old Culture." *Field Museum news* 9(5), 2-2.

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