

Kenneth E. Sassaman

I am privileged to be editor of *American Antiquity* for the next three years. My term began officially at the close of the SAA Business Meeting in Memphis this past April, but I actually started processing manuscripts at the beginning of the year. Although I am listed as Editor on the masthead of this and the previous issues, all of the content of the 2012 volume is the editorial product of my predecessor, Alison Rautman, who deserves our collective thanks for a job well done. Manuscripts I shepherded and ultimately accepted for publication will begin to appear in January 2013, including revisions of papers submitted during Alison's tenure. The first issue for which I can claim sole responsibility will be the April 2013 issue.

All of this detail speaks to the current 12-month turnaround time between acceptance and publication. Many worthy manuscripts are submitted to the journal, but space to publish them is regrettably finite. Given constraints on increasing the page count of each volume, I proposed to our colleagues in SAA governance some new guidelines on the length of manuscripts submitted to the journal. *American Antiquity* has long had general guidelines on the length of submissions, but never specified word limits. During my term as Editor, I am advising limits of 10,000 words on *Articles*, 3,000 words on *Reports*, and 1,000 words on *Comments*, each inclusive of abstract, text, notes, and references cited. The goal in enacting these changes is to shorten the turnaround time from acceptance to publication to six months or less by 2014 and to increase the number of papers published in each issue by at least 30 percent.

The new word limit for *Articles* is not much below the average length in recent years, which is about 12,000 words. Engaging topics of broad interest to the readership, *Articles* showcase inquiry through abstract, comparative, or synthetic perspectives and offer substantive or interpretative insights beyond the geographic focus of study. *Articles* are the signature contributions of our flagship journal; they are expected to have the biggest impact on the profession in featuring original, agenda-setting scholarship. Occasionally it may take more than 10,000 words to realize this expectation. I will certainly entertain publishing longer contributions when warranted, but advise authors of especially lengthy manuscripts to contact me before submitting.

The new word limits for *Reports* and *Comments* constitute a substantial reduction over recent averages. *Reports* should be just that: reports of substantive value to the profession. To the extent that *Reports* require context to establish the value of information reported, they clearly go beyond simple declarations, but they are not intended to be synthetic, comparative, or encyclopedic. Similarly, *Comments* provide opportunities for readers to correct errors of fact or interpretation. Too often the *Comments* option has been used to present new information or alternative perspectives, which then precipitates lengthy rebuttals by the original author(s). Those taking the opportunity to present original data and thinking in response to a previously published item in the journal should consider writing a full-blown *Article* or *Report*.

A high level of scholarship is intrinsic to the flagship journal of any profession and it is my responsibility to maintain that standard. I rely on the peer-review process to vet manuscripts for their

salience and publishability. Reviewers are expected to recommend for publication only those manuscripts that meet the highest standards of scholarship and have broad relevance to the readership of *American Antiquity*. For manuscripts that receive mixed reviews, in general I will recommend “revise and resubmit” only when revisions are relatively minor and a positive and timely outcome is likely. Authors whose manuscripts are rejected because of mixed reviews may elect to substantially revise and resubmit their manuscript, but manuscripts revised and resubmitted after being rejected will be treated as new submissions. This approach will improve the time to decision for submitted manuscripts, reduce the backlog of pending decisions, and improve time to publication for accepted manuscripts—outcomes that are beneficial to both authors and readers.

Of course, peer review is not without problems, and I expect to occasionally receive mixed reviews for reasons other than the shortcomings of the manuscript. I have thus established an Editorial Board of 12 leading scholars with whom I will consult on an *ad hoc* basis to help me adjudicate difficult decisions. Listed on the masthead of this issue, these colleagues occupy a range of topical, geographic, and professional niches in the field, and many have prior experience editing journals and books.

One other initiative bears mentioning. Two years ago, while contemplating the opportunity of editing *American Antiquity*, I informally polled SAA members about their expectations for the journal. I was struck by the number of colleagues who wanted to see more book reviews in each issue, and I count myself among them. I am thus creating more dedicated space for book reviews. I have enlisted my colleague Don Holly of Eastern Illinois University to serve as Associate Editor of Book Reviews, and have charged him with soliciting reviews for about 10 books per issue. We agreed to shorten the length of reviews to about 750 words each, but Don has the freedom to solicit book review essays of greater length for groups of related publications, much like those in our counterpart journal, *American Anthropologist*.

I do not know where *American Antiquity* or any other print journal will be in thirty years, but over the next three years we will take steps to ensure that its stock does not shrink in the ever-changing world of scholarly publication. Please help keep *American Antiquity* in its rightful place as the leading journal in Americanist archaeology by submitting your best work for review. I would also appreciate your adherence to the new guidelines on length, as well as your attention to the style guide, which will soon be revised and posted online. I welcome your thoughts on any matters related to the journal and its operations.