

**Society for the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition  
Annual Report 2005**

**Submitted by Miriam S. Chaiken, President  
On Behalf of SAFN Executive Board**

**Accomplishments for 2005**

As is true for many of the AAA sections, 2005 presented both challenges and opportunities, both of which were profoundly shaped by the cancellation of the 2004 AAA meeting in San Francisco, and the implementation of the AnthroSource portal for AAA publications. The cancellation of the meeting in turn resulted in the cancellation of our annual Executive Board and Business meetings, as we failed to achieve a quorum. The Executive Board was somewhat able to remedy this situation by holding a three hour long telephone conference at the end of January which allowed us to discuss pressing business, and prepare for the 2005 meetings in Washington, DC.

In spite of the logistical and financial setbacks that we note above, the Society for the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition has managed to accomplish a number of important goals, and to set the direction for future actions. The notable milestones for 2005 include:

- We ended the year in **sound financial condition**, in large measure due to the careful research and decision making of the Executive Board, and the wise counsel of our Treasurer, Daniel Sellen. We instituted a modest increase in our dues that was effective in June 2005, and represented our first dues increase in fourteen years, and only the second dues increase in the 30 year history of the section.
- **Membership** has remained relatively stable, especially “regular” membership (numbers of student members has dipped slightly), which we believe reflects the long-term commitment that most of our members have to the section.
- Publication of our column in *Anthropology News* has been consistent and of high quality, under the editorial direction of Contributing Editor Janet Chrzan. In addition to summarizing section business, the *AN* column has been used to write about substantive issues in the field of nutritional anthropology, such as the political economy of food production and food service (prompted by the lockout and strike that created the San Francisco problems), and remembrances of our field’s founding mother, Christine Wilson in notice of her death.
- We have established a new electronic means for agile communication with members through the formation of **SAFN-list** which has a secure host at the home institution of one of the executive board. This has already been used to communicate to members concerning publications of interest, breaking news issues, calls for papers and meeting notices, and other appropriate professional information.
- We had an extremely robust **participation in the 2005 Annual Meetings** in Washington, DC, in large part thanks to the effective organization of our program Chair, Andrea Wiley. Despite the fact that we are a relatively small section, we

were able to sponsor three volunteered sessions that included 20 papers, one poster session, and one invited session with 7 papers. In addition, we were able to cosponsor two invited sessions, one with the Biological Anthropology section and one with the Society for Medical Anthropology, which added 12 additional papers and/or discussants. All of the SAFN sponsored sessions had strong attendance and participation. In addition the business of the section was conducted at the annual meeting of the Executive Board, and the Business Meeting.

- We hosted a keynote **Distinguished Lecture, by Dr. Solomon Katz** that was held at the conclusion of the Business meeting. The lecture was fascinating and the room completely filled to capacity, indicating strong interest in the work that nutritional anthropologists perform, and in Dr. Katz's contributions in particular.
- Following Dr. Katz's lecture, we held a gala **30<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration** for SAFN, postponed from last year. The event was well attended and everyone enjoyed the celebration which included a decadent chocolate cake (we do, after all, have the word Food in our section name).
- We honored Ms. **Sarah Szurek with the Christine Wilson Award** for excellence in student papers in nutritional anthropology. It was fitting in the year that Dr. Wilson passed away that we had a particularly strong collection of student papers, and we were pleased to honor Ms. Szurek (University of Alabama) for her paper on "Social Identity and Food Choice in the Southeastern United States."
- While it may fall beyond the usual professional activities of the Executive Board, we felt a special responsibility to recognize the passing of our founding mother, **Christine Wilson**, who died in June 2005. She was instrumental in shaping the discipline and influenced the lives and professional experiences of many of our members, and several members of the executive Board were involved in honoring her and maintaining her legacy. With the support of her surviving brothers, her professional papers and field work materials will soon be archived at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health Medical Archives, so future scholars will have the opportunity to study the work of this important leader. There have been some modest fundraising successes with memorial contributions to the Wilson Award endowment that honors student work in the discipline. A lengthy obituary of Dr. Wilson was published in the fall in *Anthropology News* and two of our monthly columns were in part devoted to her work. Finally, two past Presidents, Barrett Brenton and Leslie Sue Lieberman, and the current President, Miriam Chaiken, will co-edit a special volume of *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* in honor of Dr. Wilson's legacy.

## **Challenges and Future Plans**

The most significant and difficult challenge that our section experienced, as did many small sections, concerned the ramifications of the implementation of AnthroSource. While we all endorse the improvement in access to AAA publications and the shift to electronic portals as the wave of the future, the financial ramifications of the implementation have been significant. We have expressed our concerns and frustrations

to AAA leadership and governing committees, especially concerning the inability to provide any firm and reliable long-term predictions of the costs and revenues that will be generated by AnthroSource. As we noted in a lengthy memo to AAA leadership in February 2005 concerning the outcome of our teleconference in January, “most of our decisions ultimately hinged on whether to participate in AnthroSource, as it has sweeping fiscal implications for us. Like many small units, we have a relatively small membership base, and thus a relatively small revenue stream. We have made decisions about trying to solidify that revenue base, but we remain with concerns about the possibility that participation in AnthroSource might bankrupt our organization – a AAA unit with a 30 year history of activity and success.” Since that time additional information shared with the Executive Board through electronic communications and participation in meetings for Presidents, Executive Board members, and Treasurers at the recent AAA meetings has only heightened our concern that if we continued publication of *Nutritional Anthropology* and participated in AnthroSource we would be facing insolvency within 18-24 months, despite our recent dues increase.

This sense of concern has provided both problems and opportunities, and ultimately has called upon us to think outside the conventional confines of academic scholarship. On the negative side, we have reluctantly decided to put on hiatus the publication of our peer-reviewed publication, *Nutritional Anthropology*. This has both good and bad implications, it frees us of logistical and financial obligations that had become problematic to maintain, but it results in a loss of one important scholarly outlet for our discipline. On the positive side, we have decided to make a concerted effort to redesign and revitalize our web site, so that it provides a more valuable resource for our members. With this background discussion in mind, we envision the following as our plans for action in the next few years:

- Identify a new secure location to house our web site and move it off of the AAA system in order to permit us greater flexibility and a **larger web presence**. We will commit funds to the initial web design, and to ensure that we have the greatest visibility through search engines. The redesigned web site will include many of the functions of *Nutritional Anthropology* and many of the newsletter services will be handled by our list-serve, SAFN-list. We envision the web presence providing opportunities to highlight programs of study in nutritional anthropology, sharing emerging research findings, identifying sources of funding, linking with organizations with complementary goals, providing syllabi for courses in nutritional anthropology, highlighting the Wilson Award competition, and many additional resources that our current site lacks. We also envision the web site providing an important venue for publicizing the activities of our standing committees, who can view this as an incentive for revitalized action.
- We will try to increase visibility, and hopefully membership by reaching out to other AAA sections and non-AAA organizations which share interests in our professional activities. Our first effort in this direction will be to invite free subscriptions to SAFN-list to non-members in related organizations, so they gain greater familiarity with the activities and interests of our section.

## **Response to AAA Executive Board and Long-Range Planning Committee**

As we have been invited to raise our concerns and challenges to the Long-Range Planning Committee and the AAA Executive Board, we would like to close with two observations. First, we have to note our concern with the past practices which have in many respects adopted a one-size-fits-all approach to AAA sections. The logistical and financial ramifications of changes such as AnthroSource are fundamentally different for a unit that has 250 members compared with one that has 2500, and we (and other small sections) are concerned that this has not been sufficiently recognized by AAA leadership in the recent past. Instead the response has been to question the viability and value of small sections, as the sentiment seems to have been that an economy of scale is the only way to do business – a sentiment that obviously we do not share. Second, we wish to note the positive – a small section like SAFN can provide an opportunity for greater personal involvement for its members than is possible for the largest units – and that has translated into very committed and engaged members for SAFN. It is no accident that we have had a 30 year history of dynamic meeting activities, publications, and professional activity, it is a reflection of the abilities, professionalism, commitment, and engaged scholarship of SAFN members. We hope that AAA will see this as an opportunity for future growth and recognize that one of our greatest strengths is the sincere commitment to the four-field roots of the discipline of anthropology, and the balance between applied and foundational scholarship that typifies the actions of SAFN members.

## **Current Officers and Executive Board Members**

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