



## The Congregational Church: Its Impact on the Evolution of New England and America

by **Dan McConnell** Courtesy of The Journal of the Cape Cod Genealogical Society, Volume 1, No. 2 [Fall 2011]

Out of the English Reformation came a variety of dissenters and non-conformists in opposition to the sole state-sponsored church, The Church of England. Those that considered a single congregation with elected officers and minister to “be church,” became the prototypes of the Congregational Churches of the future.<sup>6</sup> The two first proto-Congregational Churches were the Scrooby/Leiden/Plymouth Pilgrim church, and the Jacobs/Lothrop congregation of London, Scituate, and Barnstable.<sup>6,13,14</sup> They were the prototypes of the Congregational churches that came to dominate the New England landscape.

But how did these early churches become the model for those to follow and how did the Congregational Way have such a profound effect on the culture, society, religion, and government of New England and America in general? After all, weren’t these people the grim authoritarian Puritans that modern Americans find so peculiar and oppressive? What did they and their churches have to do with us?

A school of thought is found among historians, gaining ascendancy in recent decades, to the effect that “these people” were, in fact, the very radical reformers that broke the mold of English aristocratic society [late Feudal] and government and ushered in the most democratic, literate [and contentious] society which the world had ever seen. Many historians point to these New England Congregationalists as the foundational basis for “government by the consent of the governed” and the ultimate root cause of the break with the English Crown.<sup>16,18,19</sup>

To understand why this point may be critical, let us begin with the rapid expansion of the Congregational Churches during the Great Migration to New England [1630-1640]. As mentioned earlier, the church at Plymouth [1620] was founded on the Congregational model. Those that followed were as well. The key characteristics of the Congregational model were as follows:<sup>6,16,18,19</sup>

1. **The Congregational Covenant.** The core belief was that a group of believers would gather together in a formal covenant with each other to form a church structured on those formative church gatherings described in the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles.
2. **Church Structure.** Each congregation was to be a church unto itself, with no hierarchical authority over it. The members of each gathered congregation were to elect the officers of the church, each member having one vote, including elders, deacons and the minister. No selection or ordination of the minister by

the Church of England Bishops would be carried out, as was the case in England. All was to be decided by the “consent of the individual congregants,” essentially, “by the consent of the governed.” On-going decisions such as the addition of new members, the disciplining of wayward members, and the dismissal of ministers, was to be accomplished in the same way.

The existence and importance of similar sister churches was understood. As long as a sister church was considered a “true church,” that is, based on the same concept, members could move from one town and congregation to another, receiving a letter of “dismission” from the first congregation and a ready acceptance from the second. Sister churches could be consulted on matters of theology, doctrine and discipline, but no congregation was to have any authority over another.<sup>18,19</sup>

Other Congregational Churches were formed in rapid succession: Salem in 1628, Boston in 1630, closely followed by Roxbury, Watertown, Newtown [Cambridge], etc. By 1640, over 20,000 new immigrants had arrived from England, establishing over 20 towns, each with its own Congregational Church all on the same model with little variance.<sup>18</sup>

By 1635, towns were being settled on the Connecticut River by congregations on the move from the Boston area to establish settlements such as Hartford, Windsor, and Springfield. By 1640, New Haven, Stamford, and other towns along the Connecticut and Long Island shores had been settled by other congregations on essentially the same model.

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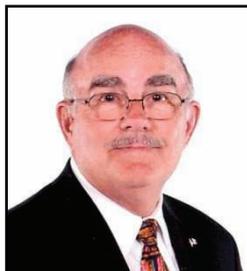
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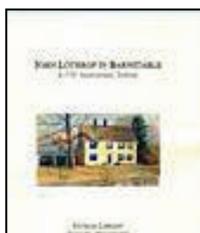
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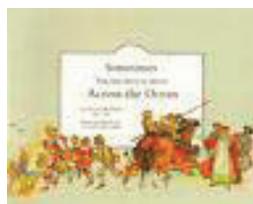
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**Lothrop Books to Ponder:****John Lothrop in Barnstable**Compiled by Lucy Loomis. Barnstable, MA : Sturgis Library, 2011. **Second edition, revised.** 58 pages. Color photographs.

Contents include biographical and historical information on the Rev. John Lothrop, his congregation, his historic Bible (which is now on display at the Sturgis Library), his meetinghouse, and a history of the building and its inhabitants from the time it was a meetinghouse to the present day. It also includes a full transcript of

Lothrop's diary, and photographs of the Sturgis Library and the Lothrop Bible. It concludes with a list of resources and websites. This second edition corrects a few errors, and is dedicated to Dan McConnell

This is an important resource for genealogical researchers, historians, and members of the Lothrop, Lothrop, Lathrop, Lathrop, Lowthorpe, and allied families.

**Sometimes You Just Have to Move Across the Ocean :  
The Story of John Lathrop 1584 -1653**

Written and illustrated by Vivian McConkie Adams.

American Fork, UT : Pitchfork Publishing, 2010. Second edition, revised and corrected. Oblong 4to. 29 pp. Color illustrations.

A charmingly written and illustrated book for children which tells the story of Reverend John Lathrop / Lothrop, one of the original founders of the town of Barnstable, Massachusetts. Lathrop, who had been jailed in England for his religious beliefs, journeyed across the ocean with his followers to settle in the new world. They originally landed in Scituate but soon afterward settled on Cape Cod. Many famous and not-so-famous Americans are descended from Reverend John.

**To purchase either of these, you can:**

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One issue that has created much confusion and needs clarification, is that of the terminology of “Separatists” and “Non-Separatists” in the establishment of early Congregational Churches. Plymouth Colony has been termed Separatist, as has Rhode Island under Roger Williams. The others, Massachusetts Bay, in particular, held themselves to be Non-Separatist. In England, the difference in terminology had meaning, and that difference was political, not theological. A Separatist church, such as that of Robert Browne in the 1580s, denied the authority of the Bishops to ordain and regulate ministers, hence denying the authority of the King as head of the Church of England. To the Crown, this denial was treasonous and served to subject both ministers and congregation to arrest. True Separatists also held that The Church of England was not a true church, thus rendering its baptisms, marriages, and communions to be invalid in their view.<sup>6,18,19</sup>

The position of the Plymouth Pilgrims and the Lothrop congregation, under the guidance of their foundational ministers John Robinson, Henry Jacob, and **John Lothrop**, was that the congregation should elect its own ministers [hence denying the authority of the Bishops], but that The Church of England was still a true church, meaning that it was acceptable to attend services and have one’s children baptized therein. To be accurate, these congregations should be called Semi-Separatist, not to be confused with Brownists or true Separatists.<sup>6,13,14,19</sup>

The position of the churches in the other New England Colonies was more ambiguous. Their church structures were identical to those of Plymouth Colony. No Bishops were consulted nor asked to ordain ministers. No English Parish structures were established. Officers were elected. The only difference was that the ministers and Colony officers, somewhat disingenuously, stated their love of the mother church of England, although in practice, they went their Separatist ways. They had to hide such practice from the Crown and Archbishop Laud, as best they could, but the only things that saved them from the wrath of the Archbishop and the Crown were three thousand miles of ocean, the English Civil War, and the Cromwell Protectorate. One might best call the churches of Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut “Crypto-Separatist,” as they were Separatist in fact, but pretended to be otherwise. Upon the Restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660, it was then too late to re-establish Church of England authority. The Congregational Way was firmly established.<sup>18,19</sup>

Some historians have interpreted this ground incorrectly, judging that Plymouth Colony was more rigid and radical, hence more authoritarian, because it was Separatist. Some, such as Nathaniel Philbrick in his book “Mayflower,” have gone so far as to say that the Plymouth Separatists deserved to go into the dustbin of history for their Separatist radicalism. In fact, all of the New England Congregational Churches were inherently and equally separatist. The Plymouth Colony was, in fact, milder in its government, it hanged no witches, convicted no Quakers, persecuted no Baptists, by comparison with their neighbors to their North.

Disagreement and controversy were rife among Congregational Churches, however, across New England on grounds of theology. The argument that a Christian was to be saved by God’s grace

alone led to disagreements. Congregational practice held that an educated ministry was necessary. The role of the minister was to teach correct doctrine from the authority of the Bible. Some argued that one’s own interpretation of the Bible, and God’s direct grace to the individual, was enough. Anne Hutchinson in Boston brought many adherents to her side on this issue, as did Roger Williams in Salem. Their un-orthodoxy led to their banishment from Massachusetts by the government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and their subsequent flight to Rhode Island, where Williams established a more tolerant government. Quakers held to an even more person-centered interpretation of grace, and were persecuted in Massachusetts but not in Plymouth or Rhode Island.<sup>16,18,19</sup>

As new towns were formed into the 1700s, and a single Congregational Church was established in each town, the Congregational Way became utterly dominant. Inhabitants of each town became well accustomed to the principle that each male church member had a vote on all church matters. Nothing could be accomplished without a vote of the Congregation. The impact of this phenomenon on the governance of the towns, the colony, and all of New England was immeasurable, because the meetings of the local church became the model for the Town Meeting--the embodiment of government by consent on a local level.<sup>18,19</sup>

To see how this trend evolved, it is important to take a step back to the English society whence they came. In 17th Century England, fewer than 5% of English males could vote on any matter affecting their lives. The voting privilege was restricted to large landowners, aristocrats, and wealthy merchants. Further, the wealthy and powerful had special privileges before the law, the courts, and the granting of charters, monopolies, and Crown grants of land. The other 95% had few political rights, other than issues of law between commoners. In addition, fewer than 10% of English men and women could read and write, a serious hurdle to overcome. The literate were the landed gentry, the clergy, wealthy merchants, and the aristocracy.<sup>6,16,18,19</sup>

When governments were established in the New England colonies, radical changes were put in place immediately. Since most early immigrants to New England were driven by religious concerns, and every church was set up on the Congregational model, certain principles carried over into government policy.

The privilege of voting was immediately extended to all male “freemen” in every town. This privilege included the right to vote in all Town Meetings for colonial officers and for representatives to the General Court. A freeman was defined generally as a male member of a local church, which meant that from the beginning 40% to 50% of the male adult population was allowed to vote on all governmental matters, a tenfold increase over English practice. On some matters, such as land distribution, the right to vote in Town Meetings was extended to all residents, church members or not. The effect represented a sea of change in the participation by the populace and the establishment of the concept that for the first time; Colonial Americans in general had the right to affect government matters, not just the “better people” of society. Non-church members could not vote in the beginning nor could women, but both would

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**Continued from the preceding page:** gain these rights over time. Later when the British government tried to replace elected colonial governments with Crown appointments and to restrict the “democratical trends,” they met stern resistance.<sup>19</sup>

A parallel belief among early Congregationalists was that all people, men, women, and children, even indentured servants in a household, should be taught to read and write, so that they could read and interpret the Bible on their own. The authoritarian view in England was that, to quote Elizabeth I, “It is not mete for the vulgar people to interpret the Bible. It is for their betters to do it for them.”<sup>6,18,19</sup>

The New England colonies set up the world’s first system of universal education. Each head of household was required to teach the basics of reading and writing. All towns were required to establish grammar schools to provide the next level of education. Already, by 1636, Massachusetts Bay had established Harvard College to provide for the education of clergy. The effect of 100% literacy on the culture of New England was profound. An educated populace with a much higher percentage of those with voting rights, and a government and church structure that emphasized the rights of people to be heard and have their say, was a society that would no longer accept the right of Kings and their surrogates to control their lives.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, the effect of the colonial governments on religious freedom was not as positive. The culture of a congregation and of a Town Meeting was highly democratic. The effect of church congregations on each other was mild and limited to that of instruction and guidance.

The Colonial Governments varied significantly on how heavy-handed was their authority in matters of religious dogma and morality. Plymouth Colony and Rhode Island were relatively mild in their effect on the governed. Massachusetts Bay was another matter for several reasons. First, it was by far the largest colony in the early years and was most visible to the English government. In the 1630s, Archbishop Laud threatened to investigate reports concerning the Separatist practice of the churches in the colony. Second, Governor John Winthrop was himself of the landed gentry, as were many other officers of the colony. He espoused the historic English belief that “some were intended to lead, some to follow,” intending the leadership for him and his colleagues who had gained the charter in the first place. His style was therefore more authoritarian than in the other colonies, a matter compounded by his desire to suppress any dissent that might get back to the Crown. His views of government got himself into trouble with the electorate, who showed their displeasure by voting him out of office, followed by re-election, followed by being voted out of office once again. The English Civil War, beginning in 1640, took away the scrutiny of the colony’s governance, but the Restoration in 1660 brought it back in full force.

The greatest cause of intolerance, however, was embedded in the early proto-constitution of the colony, the Massachusetts Bay Body of Liberties of 1641. Although many of the laws were groundbreaking in the furtherance of government by consent and in reducing the harshness of English punishment for many offenses, some were unfortunate. The government established its

authority [section 95] “for the protection and removal of error – in the churches in this jurisdiction – and for the preserving of truth and peace” to regulate orthodoxy of belief. In part, this law was established to prevent disturbances such as the Antinomian controversy of Anne Hutchinson and the disagreements with Roger Williams. The unfortunate aftermath was the oppression of Quakers and Baptists in the colony.<sup>19,20</sup>

By 1700, although the Congregational Church was totally dominant across New England, one positive influence emanating from the Crown was the movement toward more religious tolerance after the Glorious Revolution of 1689 and the ascension of William and Mary.

Membership in the Congregational Churches became less restrictive as time passed, accompanied by a rise in the percentage of freeman. The Half-Way Covenant of 1662 permitted non-members to present their children for baptism. By the early 1700s and the emergence of the Great Awakening, church membership was virtually opened to all. Similarly, the privilege of voting was extended to all male inhabitants, leading progressively to universal suffrage.

The ultimate disestablishment of the Congregational Church in the early 1800s meant that taxes could no longer be mandated in its support. The concurrent splintering of the church into the Unitarian, Universalist, and Trinitarian Congregational forms also meant an end to its dominance, even in New England.<sup>18</sup>

The great legacy of the Congregational Way, however, lay in the universal embrace of the principle of government of church or state by the consent of the governed, a legacy that led inexorably to the break with England in 1775. In the end, the government of George III could not reverse what had been set in motion 150 years earlier in the rocky soil of New England.

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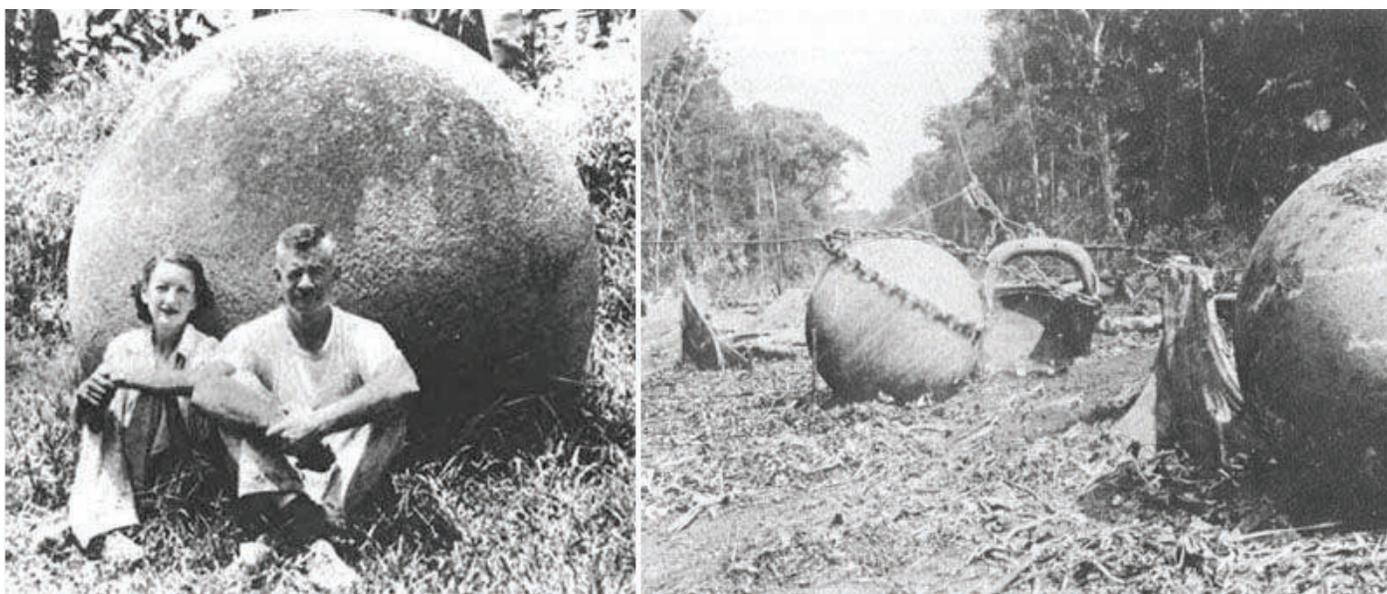
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## Our Own Indiana Jones

This **Samuel Kirkland Lothrop** was born in 1892. Upon his graduation from Harvard College, he joined A.V. Kidder's archaeological dig at Pecos (New Mexico), thus beginning a long and illustrious career at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. After earning a PhD in anthropology from Harvard, Lothrop was appointed Director of the Museum's Central American Expedition (1916-1917). From 1917-1950, Samuel K. Lothrop worked on numerous Harvard's Peabody Museum sponsored expeditions, mostly in South and Central America, Antigua, and Puerto Rico.

And from 1919-1934, he served as Associate in Anthropology and, in 1935, was promoted to Research Associate (Anthropology for Middle America), a title he held until 1940. That same year, he assumed the position of Assistant Curator (Middle America Archaeology) and became Curator of the Department in 1943. He assumed the position of Curator for Andean Archeology from 1947 until his retirement in 1960.

Lothrop was instrumental in founding the Institute of Andean Research and served as an active participant and President for many years. He also conducted expeditions sponsored by the Carnegie Institute of Washington (CIW) and the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation). During this time, he traveled extensively throughout Central and South America, Mexico and Puerto Rico.



Samuel Kirkland Lothrop and his wife Eleanor pose in front of one of the thousands of carved perfectly round stones found in Costa Rica around 1920

Upon his death in 1965, Lothrop's colleagues described him as a brilliant, unorthodox scholar with an innate talent for storytelling. He left behind a legacy of publications that discuss his archaeological and anthropological research and explorations which include 11 books published from 1919 to 1951

### A Secret Agent in the Family?

This is where the story gets a little more interesting. Lothrop was a genuine archaeologist and a secret agent working for the US Naval Intelligence in WW2. By the time he got to Costa Rica he'd been working for none other than J. Edgar Hoover as part of the Special Intelligence Service (SIS). These guys were expected to engage in espionage, grooming informants and destabilising 'anti-American' interests...the proto-CIA. His time in Costa Rica was openly studying the spheres and culture, which could provide excellent cover for other activities. He'd spent time in Peru and had been so engrossed in the spy game that he voiced concerns of blowing his cover on either side. He simply wasn't showing any evidence of being an archaeologist...

"As regards the archaeological cover for my work in Peru, it was based on the understanding that I was to be in the country six months or less. It is wearing thin and someday somebody is going to start asking why an archaeologist spends most of his time in towns asking questions. This won't happen as soon as it might because the Rockefeller grant for research in Peru makes me a contact man between the field workers and the government."

According to the FOIA mentioned in the above, Lothrop resigned from the SIS in late 1944. In a biography after his death, the author doesn't seem to know about his past services and remarks that Lothrop was an independent man of means until his death in '65. Does that sound like a retired agent? Who knows?

## Prehistoric Stone Balls--a Mystery

Hundreds dot the Costa Rican jungle, as baffling as the monuments of Stonehenge.

By Eleanor Lothrop

As the unscientific wife of a scientist, who for years has tagged along on archaeological expeditions, I have witnessed many seemingly unexplainable discoveries, but none has provided a greater challenge or teased my imagination more acutely than the unbelievable stone balls found in Central America. The riddles they pose would threaten the deductive powers of a Sherlock Holmes.

Why should hundreds of these perfectly shaped spheres, ranging in diameter from a few inches to eight feet, be scattered through the jungles southwestern Costa Rica? How could prehistoric people have shaped them with only the crudest of tools? And how could they have moved them over hill and dale from the distant sources of stone? No other stone balls of like size have been found anywhere else in the world, except for a few in the highlands of Guatemala and in Vera Cruz. The smooth, beautiful and almost perfectly rounded spheres give mute testimony to the artistic powers of an ancient people and tax modern man's ingenuity in explaining their workmanship and significance. My acquaintance with them came about by pure chance.

A few years ago, my husband and I had made plans to spend the winter digging in a small Costa Rican town called Filadelfia, near the Nicaraguan border, where we had begun work the winter before. We reached Costa Rica prepared for any emergency, or so we thought, but we had overlooked the possibility of a revolution. There had been shooting and a few murders near the Nicaraguan frontier, bandits were taking advantage of the situation to loot the countryside, and Filadelfia might well be on their route.

We wanted to keep to our plan, but the Lothrops were not thought to be worth a possible international incident, and Filadelfia was declared definitely out of bounds.

Two weeks after our arrival in Costa Rica, we were comfortably ensconced in the house of friends in San José, with no apparent prospect of getting any further. Neither Sam nor I was happy. We were feeling especially desperate one day when our hostess came forth with the magic word. "Palmar." Palmar? What's that? asked Sam.

A banana plantation on the Panamanian border, she answered. "And what do you find there besides bananas?" asked Sam, without much enthusiasm.

"Well," said our hostess, "there may be ancient burials, although I'm not entirely sure. But there are some very strange stone balls—obviously prehistoric, though no one knows what they represent or where they come from."

"No one knows?" said Sam. His eyes lit up, and his face took on the look of a bloodhound about to be let loose on the scent. After all, the work of an archaeologist and a detective is basically the same, with the small difference that a detective gets much better pay.

"Let's go to Palmar," said Sam. At Palmar, we found that the United Fruit Company had built an elaborate settlement for their employees in the midst of a steaming jungle some twelve miles

from the Pacific coast. We were allotted the comfortable house of a vacationing employee and were soon looking for the stone balls. We didn't have far to go. Next door was the house of the company manager, and beyond it a public park. In the exact center of the park was a perfectly rounded sphere about three feet in diameter.

"Sam, we've found it," I cried, feeling like Archimedes, or perhaps Mrs. Archimedes.

"It!" exclaimed the company manager. "Why, there are lots of them. Are you interested?"

We admitted we were very much interested, and the company manager straightway took us on an inspection tour. We crisscrossed thousands of acres under cultivation, and the countryside fairly teemed with stone balls. The company manager seemed to know each one personally and stopped the car six or seven times for us to get out and take notes. A few days later we started work in earnest.

In two months we examined 60-odd balls in their original locations; some underground where they had been covered with silt from overflowing rivers. There must have been hundreds or even thousands we didn't see. There were also great chunks of rock, the remains of balls that superstitious natives had blasted to bits in the belief that they might contain gold.

The balls were almost all carved from the local lava, and they varied in size and workmanship. Even the poorer ones, however, were extraordinarily well

made, and our measurements showed that the ones that had apparently been shaped by the Epstein of that time were nearly perfect spheres.

On the morning we started work, I was surprised to see that Sam's equipment consisted of a tape measure and a fishing line with a lead sinker hanging from the end of it.

"Where's your hook?" I asked, wondering if he had decided to have a day's fishing on the near-by river.

He gave me a long-suffering look. "This is a plumb bob," he explained. "It is attached to what is called a plumb line." He spoke slowly and clearly as if to a child. "As the bottom of many of the big balls are underground, and it would take too long to dig them out, we will use the plumb bob to measure their diameters to find out if the balls are perfectly round. See?"

"Of course," I said at once, although I didn't see at all.

I still don't see, although for many days I watched Sam performing incredible gyrations with plumb line dangling from one hand and tape measure clutched in the other, while I ran around blindly jotting down figures.

The first site we tackled contained three enormous stone balls, and after several hours of mysterious computations, Sam pronounced all three to be six feet in diameter and practically perfect spheres.

"Good," I said with relief, as the temperature had reached 94 degrees and my head ached. "Let's go home and have a cold drink." **Continues on the next page**

The ancient stone spheres of Costa Rica were made world-famous by the opening sequence of "Raiders of the Lost Ark," when a mockup of one of the mysterious relics nearly crushed Indiana Jones.

**Continued from the preceding page:** “Not at all,” said Sam. “As long as the diameters don’t show any variation, we’d better take the circumferences . . .”

“Why?” I asked, which is the word I use most frequently on archaeological trips.

Sam sighed. “Because anything that is six feet in diameter must be almost twenty feet in circumference, and errors will therefore be more easily detected.”

This time I swallowed the “why” because I recognized that no explanation would make a mathematician of me. So we enlisted the aid of two workmen to help hold the tape. Even so, it was a difficult job. We took five circumferences on each of the first two balls. Sometimes I would climb on top of the sphere, sometimes lie on the ground, and occasionally I tried to stand on my head. When the measurements all turned out to vary less than an inch, I decided we had done an awful lot of work for nothing; but Sam seemed pleased. And Armando, one of our workmen, a youth of 22 who was wildly enthusiastic about everything American, said “Okay.” He had mastered two other English phrases: “What’s cooking?” and “Nuts to you,” neither of which he understood.

It was hard to believe that the stone balls could have been manufactured without some mechanical aid, but no instruments of any kind were found to give us a clue.

If the conquering Spaniards ever witnessed the process, which seems unlikely, they made no record of it. As there were no stone quarries in the neighborhood, we asked Armando, who had a life-long knowledge of the surrounding country, whether he had ever seen one.

“Never,” he answered. “There are none anywhere near here.” “You’re sure?” Sam insisted.

“Sure,” said Armando, and added, “Nuts to you.”

This time, by pure chance, he had picked the right phrase. Others we asked agreed that there were no quarries within miles, and we ourselves conducted a fruitless search. The balls must therefore have been manufactured at some remote spot, as the rough blocks could never have been moved any distance. The largest ones must have weighed a great many tons.

It is hard enough to imagine how the Indians managed to roll the finished spheres through overgrown jungle and to the tops of adjacent mountains, where some of them have been found.

“In fact, it’s impossible,” I said to Sam. “I believe they are some sort of cosmic phenomenon like meteors. Maybe they dropped from the sky.”

“If so, it’s lucky they didn’t hit anyone,” said Sam without a smile.

“But seriously,” I insisted, “even Man Mountain Dean couldn’t have transported one of these enormous things on dry land. And as for crossing the rivers. . . .”

Sam interrupted my eloquence and put me in my scientific place. “The Indians undoubtedly built rafts for carrying them over the rivers in the rainy season when the water was deep.”

“But why was it so important to get them here?” I asked. “And why did the Indians bother to make them? It must have taken a man a lifetime just to turn out one, and what could he do with it when it was finished?”

And so, not having done very well with our first problem, we found ourselves up against our second.

The stone balls were obviously of great importance to the people who made them, though they could have had no practical

purpose. I spent my time trying to think of every possible use to which they might have been put, even entertaining the notion of games for the kiddies or bowling contests. Some did weigh only a couple of pounds, but most of them would have required an army of men just to set them in place.

“I have come to the conclusion,” I finally pontificated, “that the balls had no useful purpose.” Which of course Sam had known all along. “Could they have been for decoration?” I asked.

Sam shook his head. “They must have had religious significance,” he said. “Their position bears out that theory.”

“Position?” I asked, completely confused. “How?”

“We’ve examined five large groups,” he explained, “of which at least three appear to be in their original positions. In each case, there was a base line of three, four, or five balls. All these groups had additional balls flanking the main line in such a

fashion that three of them formed a triangle. By arranging them this way, various lines of sight were created, which may be of astronomical and ritualistic importance.”

“Why?” I asked.

Sam gave me a look of patient forbearance. “Because these lines of sight may very well have had some relationship to the sun, thus showing seasonal changes and helping the people to know the right time of year to plant their crops. In certain regions of the Maya area the Indians built structures for this purpose. Some of the Maya stelae, for example, are linked to astronomy. And here the same result was probably obtained by means of the stone balls.”

“But that’s a practical purpose,” I protested. “Not religious.”

“Astronomy and religion were closely associated with the practical pursuits of life such as agriculture,” Sam said.

I nodded and tried to look intelligent. It was obvious even to me that the stone balls must have a religious significance, if for no other reason than that it was the only explanation for them.

The third question—when the balls were made—was the only one for which we found a definite, if only partial, answer. Sam had decided to devote the rest of our stay in Palmar to digging for other evidence of the people who made the balls. This delighted me, because a dig is very much like a treasure hunt; and it delighted the workmen even **Continues on the next page**



John Hoopes, University of Kansas associate professor of anthropology and director of the Global Indigenous Nations Studies Program, recently returned from a trip to Costa Rica where he and colleagues evaluated ancient stone spheres for UNESCO, the United Nations cultural organization that might grant the spheres World Heritage Status. (Credit: Courtesy of John Hoopes)

**Continued from the preceding page:** more, who were certain we would find gold. It seems that three years previously a large piece of ground was being prepared for cultivation when a Costa Rican who was driving a bulldozer noticed a glitter in the earth. Jumping out of his machine, he clawed excitedly at the ground until he extracted a pot filled with gold ornaments. He promptly removed his helmet, stuffed it with treasure and disappeared, leaving the engine of the bulldozer running.

He sold six of the pieces in Palmar for about \$240; the rest he took to San José where, according to local gossip, he disposed of them for \$7,000, living for one year in the capital in great style on the proceeds. He was now back at his old job penniless after his big fling.

This story had fired the imaginations of all the other Company laborers, and the spot had been pulled to pieces, although nothing more had turned up. The Fruit Company had finally been forced to decree that digging without special permission was illegal.

We found no gold; but we did find two stone balls in one of the first pits we sank; They were not far below the surface; and we dug them out in order to see if there was anything underneath.

The balls were resting on stone platforms; so we knew they were in their original positions.

When pottery turned up below the area where the platforms had been placed, Sam's expression resembled that of a man who had

found the equivalent of the Kohinoor diamond; The pottery was interesting, and I was pleased too, but Sam's enthusiasm seemed excessive.

"It may give us an idea how old the balls are," he explained.

Sam's optimism was justified. Some of the pottery under one of the stone platforms turned out to be of classical Chiriqui type, best known in western Panama. We already knew from other evidence that this pottery was still being made at the time of the Spanish Conquest. Thus, by the same token, the stone ball found above it must also have been made at approximately the same period. The majority of the stone balls were probably considerably older, but it is safe to say that, although their date of origin is open to speculation, the cult of making stone balls was a late one, continuing into the sixteenth century.

Someday more information may be procured, but meanwhile the balls remain as enigmatical as the huge statues on Easter Island or the monuments of Stonehenge. In each of these places, enormous stones have been quarried, shaped, and moved without mechanical devices except ropes for hauling them and inclined ramps for lifting them.

Maybe our own civilization contains elements of material culture that will survive all knowledge of their purpose. So it goes: one era's triumph is the next era's riddle.

### More on the Reunion



**Meet the Bakers, Toby, Hope and Ben, brothers and sister share a laugh at the Reunion dinner.** Hope was instrumental in organizing the Reunion event, as she was the reunion treasurer. A job well done, I might add! Ben and his wife Deborah, "Debbie" are co-presidents of the Lothrop Family foundation for 2012 & 2013.