

8-30-2024

## Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg (16 March 1948–19 May 2023)

Monica Barnes

*American Museum of Natural History*, [monica@andeanpast.org](mailto:monica@andeanpast.org)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/andean\\_past](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/andean_past)

---

### Recommended Citation

Barnes, Monica (2024) "Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg (16 March 1948–19 May 2023)," *Andean Past*: Vol. 14, Article 6.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/andean\\_past/vol14/iss1/6](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/andean_past/vol14/iss1/6)

This Obituaries is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Andean Past* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).

ELLEN FITZSIMMONS STEINBERG (16 MARCH 1948–19 MAY 2023)

Monica Barnes  
American Museum of Natural History  
[monica@andeanpast.org](mailto:monica@andeanpast.org)



*Self-guided study group at Cahokia, Illinois, May 2009.*

*From left to right: David Fleming, Robert L. Carneiro, Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg, Jack Prost, William I. Woods, Junie Valhund, and Lilian Rebellato. Photograph by Monica Barnes.*

Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg had a deep and long-standing interest in Andean cultures that led her to make valuable contributions to our field. Born in Chicago to James A. FitzSimmons, a dentist, and to his wife, Jayne M. FitzSimmons, Ellen lived in Chicagoland almost her entire life, and deeply appreciated her city's

heritage. She was a great guide to the area's many Frank Lloyd Wright buildings. Indeed, her husband, Jack H. Prost, once owned the Arthur B. Heurtley House in Oak Park, Illinois, but gave it up for love of Ellen.

Ellen was proud of both her natal Irish heritage and of the connection with Judaism she forged. She received her primary education from Sacred Heart School in Chicago. She graduated from Beloit College in 1969, with a major in anthropology, and she remained a loyal alumna throughout her life. She obtained a master's degree in anthropology in 1992 and a doctorate in education in 1998, both from the University of Illinois Chicago. She developed a fascination with pre-Columbian cultures while living with her family in Colombia (FitzSimmons 1993; Steinberg and Richardson 1992a, 1992c).

Ellen successfully cultivated a variety of interests. With Jack, a physical anthropologist who taught for many years at the University of Illinois Chicago, she studied the mummies from Ancón, Peru that were brought to the Field Museum by George Amos Dorsey as a result of his 1891 excavations (Dorsey 1894; Prost and Steinberg 2001; Steinberg 1993, 1996; Steinberg and Prost 1999; Steinberg and Weinstein 1994). As a development of her interest in Ancón, she and Jack published their study of Knut Hjalmar Stolpe's work in Peru in *Andean Past* 8 (Steinberg and Prost 2007). Stolpe was a Swedish ethnographer who visited Ancón after the German archaeologists Wilhelm Reiss and Alphons Stübel (Reiss and Stübel 1998 [1880–1887]) and before George Amos Dorsey. Stolpe explored coastal Peru as part of a Swedish around-the-world ethnographic expedition that occurred from 1883 until 1885. The appendices to that article are the only material we have published in Swedish.

Ellen extended her skeletal analyses to materials from the pre-contact American Midwest, studying human remains from Fort Ancient sites, including Anderson Village (FitzSimmons *et al.* 1995).

Her work on cranial modification, as practiced at Ancón and elsewhere, had implications

for the medical profession when she demonstrated that what appeared to be a severe pathology observed among the children of Mexican immigrants in the United States was, in fact, a deliberate and harmless head shaping thought to confer attractiveness, intelligence, and ethnic identity by the people who practiced it (FitzSimmons *et al.* 1998).

Not afraid to switch topics, Ellen took a turn into ethnography, first exploring a family's attitudes towards the death of one of their members (FitzSimmons 1994–1995). Her doctoral dissertation examined the learning experiences of Afro-American children (FitzSimmons 1999). She continued her support for Black expression through the Young Chicago Writers organization. Another switch was to a concentration on Midwestern German Jewish communities and their foodways. She published three books on the topic (Steinberg 2004; Steinberg and Hanson 2007; Steinberg and Prost 2011), as well as encyclopedia articles, (Steinberg and Prost 2017a–k) and presented lectures on the theme (Steinberg 2005, 2007b, 2011a, 2012, 2014a).

Ellen's Jewish food books were prompted by the kind of research serendipity that our colleague Dick Daggett has dubbed an "Ellen Event". The original Ellen Event occurred in a secondhand bookstore where she literally tripped over a box of old papers. These turned out to be the diaries, culinary notes, and clippings of Irma Rosenthal Frankenstein, a once-prominent Chicago society hostess who had slipped into obscurity after her death. Ellen bought the box and its contents which became the basis for a book on Irma's life and times. This changed the direction of Ellen's own life and for the next two decades she devoted herself to culinary history (see also Steinberg 2012; Steinberg and Prost 2008, 2017a–k). Her second book on the subject presented the recipes Irma collected, which typified Reform Jewish cuisine in Chicago

during the first half of the twentieth century and can be related to the early editions of the famous *The Way to a Man's Heart: "The Settlement" Cook Book* (Kander and Schoenfeld 1903). Ellen highlighted that immigrants often favored food strongly flavored with herbs and spices, while various American food reformers promoted the notion that a bland diet was a healthier regimen (Steinberg 2007a). Her knowledge of the Chicago culinary scene was broad and deep and led to some memorable meals in dumpling houses, steak houses, Irish pubs, breweries, Greek restaurants, and tapas bars. It prompted long discussions of the merits of Italian beef sandwiches and Chicago hotdogs.

Ellen and Jack have been a big influence on my life. They made many trips to Korea and to China, where they had adopted relatives. Without them, and their East Asian study tours, I may never have discovered pu'er tea or K-drama. Somehow, with Ellen and Jack, paths converged. When I had the honor of introducing the late geographer, William (Bill) I. Woods to my lifelong friend, Robert (Bob) L. Carneiro, we discovered that Bob, an international expert on chiefdoms and the development of the state, had never been to Cahokia, the site of a large Mississippian city near St. Louis. Bill had worked there and knew it well. In 2009, we organized a self-guided study tour, inviting Lilian Rebellato, a Brazilian archaeologist; my husband, David Fleming; Junie Valhund, Bill's canine companion; and Ellen and Jack to join us (see Robert L. Carneiro's obituary in this issue of *Andean Past*). I remember warm days exploring not only Cahokia, but its environs including putative Mafia grave sites, Fort de Chartres, the Modoc Rock Shelter, a biker bar, and a giant ketchup bottle. Each evening we gathered in our hotel for good American food and archaeology talk. Multiple lightning strikes did not faze us or the hotel staff.

Ellen's home in River Forest, Illinois was modeled after a house in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Her garden complemented its architecture, and was featured in several print publications. Lots of people have figurative skeletons in their closets, but Ellen and Jack had a real one, used by Jack for teaching, reclining in their basement sauna when not attending class. If it happened to be winter, there would also be a pair of carp in the basement, swimming in their tank, awaiting spring, when they could transfer to their outdoor pond. Ellen was nothing if not interesting.

Ellen presented nearly a hundred academic and popular lectures. At the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory she explored aspects of the bioarchaeology of the Ancón human remains (Prost and Steinberg 2001; Steinberg 1993, 1994b, 1996; Steinberg and Prost 2002; Steinberg and Weinstein 1994; Steinberg *et al.* 1994, 1996). Elsewhere, she lectured on foodways and other topics. Between 1995 and 2020 she often appeared on TV and radio, discussing the unrelated topics of Jewish food and cranial modification.

Ellen also shared her knowledge by teaching at the University of Illinois Chicago; at Morton College in Cicero, Illinois; and at DePaul University in Chicago. Her courses included "Introduction to Social Anthropology", "Human Evolution", "Fossil Humans", "Primate Biology", "Social-Cultural Anthropology", and "Frameworks of Inquiry in Educational Research". At the University of Illinois Chicago she supervised graduate level independent study and research. In the 1970s, before she began her university teaching, she was a federal quality control reviewer for the Illinois Department of Public Aid. That is, she was a welfare fraud investigator. This position honed her research skills. Years later, when a woman with false credentials threatened an organization we both held dear, Ellen was on the case. From 1984 until 1993,

she was the owner-operator of the Cook County Durable Medical Equipment Corporation based in River Forest, Illinois.

In raising her children, Ellen also shared her love of learning. She established a foreign language program at their elementary school, used her self-taught hand-sewing skills to help daughter Sara's Brownie troop make quilts for their Cabbage Patch dolls, and she learned carpentry to assist her son Justin to build, paint, and race his Boy Scout Pinewood Derby race car. She was honored with a service award from Chicago's Henry Suder School (1998).

Ellen was a community leader and the recipient of many grants and awards. She was elected to the Phi Kappa Phi national honor society (1992) and to the Pi Lambda Theta International and Professional Association in Education (1995). She was an elected member of the Society of Woman Geographers (1998) and served as a vice-president and Chicago area chairwoman of the society. Ellen was a president of Yonah Hadassah. That was an unusual accomplishment, because she never converted to Judaism. Her leadership of a Jewish organization typifies the acceptance she found in many circles.

Along with Jack Prost and Sharon Peniston, she was awarded a grant from the University of Illinois Chicago's Office of Social Science Research to study "Infant Head-Shaping: A Cultural Practice" (1996). With Jack Prost, L. L. Sadler, and M. Rasmussen, she received a grant from the University of Illinois Chicago's Great Cities Program for her "Museum Without Walls" project (1994). She received a grant from the University of Illinois Chicago and the Field Museum to develop a project on Ancón materials that involved students affiliated with the University of Illinois Chicago, The Field Museum, The Carnegie Institute of Natural History in Pittsburgh, and the Center for Archaeological

Investigations at the Museo de Ancón in Peru (1994). From the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, she received a "High-Five" award at the University of Illinois Chicago (1992). The University of Illinois Chicago gave her an unrestricted research grant to study Tairona material from the H. H. Smith collection at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History (1992). She won a Regional Anthropological Student Conference Competition award for her paper "Space and Species as Evidenced in Tairona Area Material Culture" (1992).

Ellen was a consummate hostess, managing to be warm, generous, casual, and welcoming, yet simultaneously elegant. A few years before her death, she purchased a second home in Galena, Illinois, as a country retreat for herself, her husband, her family, and her friends.

Ellen is survived by Jack Prost, her husband of twenty-five years, as well as by her many other family members, including her daughter Sara and son-in-law Stephen Collins, her son, Justin, and her grandchildren, Owen and Graham Collins, and Michael, Sloane, and Bridget Steinberg. She is also survived by her sister Katherine and brother-in-law, naval dental researcher Gordon Jones; by her brother Michael, a noted antiques expert, and sister-in-law Angela Fitz-Simmons; and by her sister Margaret Morettini, as well as by many nieces and nephews. Ellen had a wonderful relationship with her stepchildren, Kimberly Callaway, Jay, Jason, and Justin Prost, and their ten children.

One of Ellen's lectures was titled "Irma Rosenthal Frankenstein: An Extraordinary Woman". I can restate that as Ellen Fitz-Simmons Steinberg: An Extraordinary Woman. As Ellen wrote in her dedication to her book about Irma, "may her memory be a blessing to those who treasure it."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my friend, Ellen's husband, Jack H. Prost, for his help in writing this obituary. I also thank Mai Reitmeyer and Rachel Wysoki, librarians at the American Museum of Natural History, for their assistance with obtaining references.

## WORKS BY ELLEN FITZSIMMONS STEINBERG

FitzSimmons, Ellen

- 1993 Pre-Columbian Tairona Tinklers. *The Bead Forum: Newsletter of the Society of Bead Researchers* 23:11–14.
- 1994-95 One Man's Death: His Family's Ethnography. *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying: An Official Journal of the Association for Death Education and Counseling* 30(1):23–39.
- 1999 *Teach Me: An Ethnography of Adolescent Learning: Cultural Shopping and Student Lore in Urban America*. Lanham, Maryland: International Scholars Publications (based on her 1998 doctoral dissertation, *Teach Me: An Ethnography of Public-School Children's Learning* (University of Illinois at Chicago)).
- FitzSimmons, Ellen, P. LaRocque, Karen Weinstein, and B. Manzano
- 1995 Assessing the Health of Ft. Ancient's Upper and Lower Villages' Population. In: *Conference Proceedings of the Midwest Bioarchaeology and Forensic Anthropology Society*, edited by S. Nawrocki. Indianapolis, Indiana: The University of Indiana, Department of Anthropology and Forensic Anthropology. Electronic Publication.
- FitzSimmons, Ellen, Jack H. Prost, and Sharon Peniston
- 1998 Infant Head-Molding: A Cultural Practice. *Archives of Family Medicine* 7:88–90.
- FitzSimmons, Ellen and Karen J. Weinstein
- 1994 Metastatic Carcinoma: A Case from Ancón, Peru. *Archaeologica* 23:161–174.
- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons
- 2004 *Irma: A Chicago Woman's Story 1871–1966*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- 2012 Review of *Korean Cuisine: An Illustrated History* by Michael J. Pettid. *Asian Perspectives: The Journal of Archaeology for Asia and the Pacific* 51:132–134.
- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons and Eleanor Hudera Hanson
- 2007 *Learning to Cook in 1898: A Chicago Culinary Memoir*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons and Jack H. Prost
- 2007 Bringing Ethnography Home: Knut Hjalmar Stolpe's Works in Peru (1884). *Andean Past* 8:109–143.
- 2008 A Menu and a Mystery: The Case of the 1834 Delmonico Bill of Fare. *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*. Spring: 40–50.
- 2011 *From the Jewish Heartland: Two Centuries of Midwest Foodways*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017a Allgauer, Gustav. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, p. 28. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017b Beer Gardens. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 46–47. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017c Bremner, David Francis. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 55–56. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017d Carl Buddig and Company. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, p. 62. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017e Dairy Restaurants. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, p. 87. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017f Delicatessens. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 87–88. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017g Germans. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 124–125. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017h Jews. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 147–149. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017i Media: Radio. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 177. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017j Moody, Harriet Brainard. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 185–186. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- 2017k Siebel, John Ewald. In: *The Chicago Food Encyclopedia*, pp. 227–228. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Steinberg, Ellen and L. Richardson Tominaga
- 1992a Space and Species as Evidenced in Tairona Area Material Culture. In: *The Sacred Bundle*. Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, pp. 1–17.
- 1992b The Ogee on Bell Plain Ceramics: A Southern Cult Symbol. In: *The Sacred Bundle*. Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, pp. 76–80.
- 1992c All Roads Lead to Las Tres Cruces: A Village of Specialists near Santa Marta, Colombia. In: *The Sacred Bundle*, pp. 136–148. Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, pp. 136–148.

**Selected Papers and Lectures Presented by Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg**

- Prost, Jack C. and Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg  
2001 Growth and Sex at Ancón. Paper presented at the twentieth meeting of the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, November 3–4.
- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons  
1993 Skeletal Traits and Grave Goods from Ancón, Peru. Paper presented at the twelfth meeting of the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 23–24.
- 1994a Assessing the Health of Ft. Ancient's Upper and Lower Villages' Population. Paper presented at the First Annual Bioarchaeology Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, October 1.
- 1994b Re-excavating Ancón, Peru. Invited lecture presented at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 17.
- 1996 Cranial Deformation at Prehistoric Ancón and Today. Paper presented at the fifteenth meeting of the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 19–20.
- 2002 Some Implications of Cranial Modification. Paper presented to the American Association for Dental Research (Chicago Section), Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois, October 3, 2002.
- 2003 The Ancient Peruvian Necropolis of Ancón: New Insights from Old Collections. Invited lecture presented to the Three Rivers Archaeological Society, Beloit, Wisconsin, October 13.
- 2005 Irma Rosenthal Frankenstein: An Extraordinary Woman. Invited lecture presented to the Bernard Horowitz Center, Skokie, Illinois, date unrecorded. Also presented at the Ann Katz Festival of Books, Indiana Jewish Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, October 30, 2005.
- 2008b These ARE your Grandmother's Recipes. Invited lecture presented to the Villa Park Public Library, Villa Park, Illinois, November 13.
- 2007a The Case of the Disappearing Herbs and Spices. Invited lecture presented to the Herb Society of America, January 20. Also presented to the Midwest Antiques Club, October 22, 2007 and to The Nineteenth Century Club, Oak Park, Illinois, December 1, 2008.
- 2007b Learning to Cook in 1898, and Associated Matters. Invited lecture presented to the Culinary Historians of Chicago Culinary History Roundtable, October 13. Also presented to the Highland Park Historical Society, Highland Park, Illinois, October 2, 2007 and to the River Forest Library, River Forest, Illinois, September 24, 2008.
- 2007c Lemon Balm: Its Lore and Lure. Invited lecture presented to the Herb Society of America, Midwest Section, March 31.
- 2012 Irma Rosenthal Frankenstein's Excellent Adventures. Invited lecture presented to the New York Group of the Society of Woman Geographers, March 20.
- 2011a Matzo Balls, Chopped Liver, and the Midwest: Jewish Foodways in the Heartland. Invited lecture presented to the Jewish Historical Society of Chicago, November 6. It was recorded for radio station WBEZ Chicago when she presented it to the Culinary Historians of Chicago on September 14, 2011. Also presented to the Highland Park Historical Society, Highland Park, Illinois, September 10, 2014.
- 2011b Shaping the Taste of Midwest Food. Invited lecture presented to the Lorenzo Cultural Center, Macomb, Michigan, November 9.
- 2014a Midwest Jewish Foodways. Invited lecture presented to the Oak Park Temple, Oak Park, Illinois, January 23.
- 2014b Old Cookbooks. Invited lecture presented to the Hinsdale Antiques Club, Hinsdale, Illinois, September 8.
- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons and C. Bulicek  
1995 The Invertebrate Remains of Ancón in the Field Museum. Paper presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Midwest Conference on Andean and Amazonian Archaeology and Ethnohistory, Chicago, Illinois, February 25.
- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons, Gordon K. Jones, and Charmaine C. Steinberg  
1994 Report on a Peruvian Incisal Inlay from the late Intermediate Period at Ancón. Paper presented at the Thirteenth Annual Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York, October 15–16.

- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons and Jack H. Prost  
1999 Ancón Bones: Reflections and Speculations. Paper presented at the eighteenth meeting of the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, October 23–24.
- 2002 Roughing it in Rubber: Inflating the List of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Excavators at Ancón. Paper presented at the twenty-first meeting of the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 2–3.
- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons, Jack H. Prost, and Gordon K. Jones  
1996 Report of an Incisal Inlay from Ancón, Peru. Sixty-first Annual Meeting, Society for American Archaeology, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 10–14.
- Steinberg, Ellen FitzSimmons and Karen Weinstein  
1994 Ancón, Peru: The Enigma of Porotic Hyperstosis during the Late Intermediate Period. Paper presented at the thirteenth meeting of the Northeast Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York, October 15–16.

## OTHER REFERENCES CITED

- Dorsey, George Amos  
1894 *An Archaeological Study Based on a personal Exploration of Over One Hundred Graves at the Necropolis of Ancon, Peru*. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Reiss, Wilhelm and Stübel, Alphons  
1998 [1880–1887] *The Necropolis of Ancon in Peru*. Translated by Professor A. H. Keane. Berlin, A. H. Asher & Co. [Facsimile edition of the English version of *Das Todenfeld von Ancon in Peru*. Hanover, Germany: U. Carlson].
- Kander, Mrs. Simon and Mrs. Henry Schoenfeld  
1903 *The Way to a Man's Heart* ("The Settlement" Cook Book). Milwaukee: Wisconsin: "The Settlement". Facsimile edition published by Applewood Books, Bedford, Massachusetts.



