

J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology  
KATHLEEN KIRK GILMORE 1995



Kathleen Kirk Gilmore was born in Altus, Oklahoma, moved to Tulsa as a child, and graduated from high school there. She got her first job while a junior in high school as switchboard operator at the Tulsa Bone and Joint Clinic, where she received the munificent salary, by Great Depression standards, of 25 cents an hour. Saving her money for a couple of years, she was barely able to finance her freshman year at the University of Tulsa.

But she needed to find a part-time job if she was going to continue at the university after that first year, and all the campus jobs at that time normally went to male students. Never one to be intimidated by protocol, Kathleen showed her feminist tendencies for the first time—but by no means for the last time—when she badgered the university library into giving her a job.

She had had a long-standing interest in archaeology, sparked by reading about the “lost cities of the

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Maya" at the age of 13; and when she discovered a collection of ethnographic artifacts on the library's fourth floor she was strongly tempted to major in archaeology. However, upon reflection, she decided that such a course was impractical because the cost was beyond her means. Besides, her main interest was American prehistory and the only brand of archaeology available at most universities at the time was classical. Furthermore, most jobs for female archaeologists were in museums and Kathleen wanted to get out and DIG.

So she followed a more practical course. With a \$250 loan from the Tulsa Town Club she transferred to Oklahoma University where she earned a B.S. degree in the university's prestigious geology department.

But who would hire a female geologist with a B.S. degree when all the jobs for geologists were in the field, prospecting for likely formations, drilling wells, and the like? This was considered men's work where women would be out of place; and superstitious oilworkers considered it very bad luck for a female even to step on a derrick floor.

Stifling her feminist resentment, Kathleen learned to type and take shorthand, after which she landed a job in Tulsa with a small independent oil operator, where she got to do a bit of geology, drew maps, plotted well logs, and even was permitted to visit a drilling rig or two.

But her employer soon went broke, after which Kathleen found a job with the American Association of Petroleum Geologists as editorial assistant for their *Bulletin*. This was too tame for her, however, so she quit her job and moved to Houston—center of the oil business—to seek something better. After a month or so of pounding the pavement, she got several offers—mainly because she could type, the degree in geology being only of incidental importance. Still it was nice to have options to choose from, so she decided to accept an offer from the Superior Oil Company of California to type field reports in their Corpus Christi office.

After nine months in Corpus Christi, she was offered, and took, a job back in Houston with the Standard Oil Company of Kansas. In 1940 she married Bob Gilmore, a former classmate at the University of Tulsa, and a year later they moved to Dallas where Bob was hired as a petroleum engineer with DeGoyler and MacNaughton.

During World War II there was a demand for women to replace male geologists who were called to the war effort, so Kathleen went to work for Atlantic Oil Company, doing well log analysis and running the sample lab. With the end of the war and the birth of the first of four girls, she quit her job and devoted her energies to raising her daughters.

When an archaeology curriculum was initiated at Southern Methodist University in Dallas in 1964, Kathleen was one of the first in line to register. She earned her doctorate in anthropology there in 1973.

A major field project of the historical archaeology seminar that I taught at SMU in 1967 was an effort to locate the sites of the three San Xaviér missions, established and operated for a few years in the mid-18th century by Spanish missionaries in east-central Texas. After abandonment their exact locations had become lost to memory, but surviving documents indicated with virtual certainty that they were located a short distance from one another along modern-day Brushy Creek.

After putting together a model of what we should expect to find at the mission sites (18th-century Hispanic ceramics, etc.), we sallied forth to Brushy Creek and broke up into teams, each of which was assigned to examine likely places. When the teams regrouped several hours later, Kathleen produced a sack of sherds her team had found in a vegetable garden behind a farmhouse. Most of the sherds were recent, but among them were several good 18th-century Puebla Blue-on-white Majolica sherds—precisely the kind of indicators we were looking for.

Kathleen's excitement at finding evidence of a lost Spanish mission led to an abiding passion that she pursued over the years: establishing the locations of "lost" historic sites by discovering their archaeological remains.

In 1969, with funding from the Texas State Historical Commission, she got down to serious fieldwork at the San Xaviér missions. There she found archaeological evidence to verify the locations of all three missions and the associated military garrison. This project became the topic of her M.A. thesis.

In addition to the San Xaviér complex, she has worked with colleagues in their successful search for the San Sabá mission. Other Spanish Colonial sites in Texas where she has conducted fieldwork include Rosario Mission, Nasoni Mission, Amarillas Presidio, and Loreto Presidio, the latter built on the ruins of LaSalle's ill-fated Fort St. Louis of 1685.

Talk about your late bloomers! It would be hard to find anyone who has blossomed more spectacularly than Kathleen. In 1974 she became a research archaeologist and adjunct professor in the Institute of Applied Sciences at the University of North Texas in Denton, embarked on two decades of research and teaching, and earned national recognition as an authority on Spanish Colonial archaeology, as well as a leading light in Texas archaeology, both historical and prehistorical.

During her 16 years at North Texas—she took early retirement in 1990—Kathleen trained a generation of students both in the classroom and in the field. Her feminist instincts bore fruit during this time and she became a greatly admired role model to her female students, a number of whom were inspired to follow her example to successful careers in archaeology.

Kathleen has published extensively on her Spanish Colonial fieldwork and documentary research, including site reports on the San Xaviér, Rosario, Santa Cruz de San Sabá, and Dolores de los Ais missions; also on the Presidio San Luís de las Amarillas and Fort St. León. Her synthetic publications on French-Spanish-Indian interactions and on Caddoan prehistory are widely recognized as major contributions to the discipline.

In addition to her research and teaching, Kathleen has made substantial contributions to her profession through service to archaeological and historical associations. She has been president of the Society for Historical Archaeology, president of the Texas Archeological Society, and president of the Council of Texas Archaeologists. She has served on the Texas Board of Review, which reviews and recommends nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, and on the board of directors of the Texas Historical Foundation. She has been on too many committees to mention here.

Kathleen played an important role in the birth of the SHA in January 1967, when Arnold Pilling and I organized a meeting of 15 people we considered to be among the leading historical archaeologists to consider the possibility of establishing a society devoted to historical archaeology. SMU sponsored the meeting, and Kathleen, a graduate student at the time, made most of the local arrangements for the meeting, as well as for a concurrent conference at which two days of formal papers on historical archaeology were presented. It was at this conference that the SHA was founded. Especially memorable was a party that she and Bob hosted at a private club atop a Dallas skyscraper.

After retirement, Kathleen and Bob have divided their time between their homes in Dallas and Santa Fe, and in traveling the world. Kathleen also finds time to continue her research interests in Spanish Colonial archaeology.

It is altogether fitting that the signal honor of being the first woman to receive the prestigious J. C. Harrington medal falls to an outstanding researcher, teacher, and mentor, a staunch supporter of feminine rights, truly a lady and a scholar: Kathleen Kirk Gilmore.

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