John L. Cotter Award in Historical Archaeology

Audrey J. Horning 2001

Audrey J. Horning began her collegiate career at the College of William and Mary, majoring in both history and anthropology. This dual interest and, perhaps, the Williamsburg environment sparked her decision to become an historical archaeologist. She enrolled in the graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania in the field of American studies, completed her Ph.D. in 1995, and has become a highly productive and insightful scholar.

The John L. Cotter Award is given for an outstanding contribution by a young historical archaeologist, and Audrey admirably meets this criteria. Her recognition is for two major works, a doctoral dissertation on 17th-century Jamestown and a study of the "mountain folk" of Appalachia. It is especially appropriate that Audrey receive the Cotter award because her dissertation relied upon the important evidence produced by John Cotter during his Jamestown work in the 1950s. Entitled " 'A Verie Fit Place to Erect A Great Cittie': Comparative Contextual Analysis of Archaeological Jamestown," her dissertation investigated the economic, social, and physical development of Jamestown as an urban place. She also explored the symbolic nature of Jamestown's landscape and its presentation as a key site of American heritage.

Using the previously collected data along with a suite of new archaeological investigations and documentary research funded by the National Park Service in partnership with Colonial Williamsburg, Audrey was able to reinterpret Jamestown as an historical place. Long thought to have been a center of elite activity with impressive brick structures inhabited by the wealthy,

Historical Archaeology, 2002, 36(4): 10–11.
Permission to reprint required.

her study reveals that the urban experience at Jamestown was very different. Especially important are her findings that many of the brick structures, particularly the row houses, were not built for politically and socially prominent persons and were often uninhabited. Exploring urbanization processes in 17th-century England, she demonstrates that worker housing, especially in industrializing towns, was commonly built by speculators who then profited handsomely from the rents. Speculators attempted a similar approach at Jamestown without success, due in large part to the focus of the colonial economy upon tobacco. Industrial development was encouraged at Jamestown, but it, too, failed and never attracted workers. These findings reveal that despite a perceived cultural need and serious efforts to create a town, colonial realities produced limited urbanization, aside from facilities required for the government and travelers coming to the capital. In essence, Audrey has created a new understanding of a major site of great archaeological, historical, and symbolic significance. Enhancing the relevance of this work is the fact that it will, as noted by Marley Brown, "... undoubtedly provide the basic framework of the interpretation of the town site at Jamestown Island during the 2007 observations" and beyond.

Another major effort conducted by Audrey focused upon a very different time and place, southern Appalachia. The Shenandoah National Park was created in the 1930s in the mountains of Virginia as an effort to "restore the wilderness" for public enjoyment. To accomplish this, hundreds of the inhabitants were forced to move away. These people were long characterized by sociologists and others as backward, degenerate, and primitive—cut off from the modern world and living in an almost 18th-century manner. Such a view, used to justify the removal of the inhabitants, remains a powerful and widespread stereotype that still shapes public opinion about the entire southern Appalachians and their "hillbilly" residents. With National Park Service support, Audrey explored this perspective by applying archaeological, documentary, and oral history methods to three former communities in the Shenandoah park that were a focus of 1930s sociological analysis. What she discovered is that rather than being isolated, these people were fully involved with the 20th-century world. Archaeological finds such as Japanese ceramics, phonograph records, and medicine bottles demonstrated that the residents were engaged in the market but on their own terms. Perhaps the most compelling artifactual evidence of involvement with the modern world was recovery of a Buck Rogers ray gun at one house site. Oral history expanded upon these findings and revealed that the residents creatively used the "primitive" stereotype given them to produce folk craft items for an expanding tourist market.

Audrey's research tackled a deep-seated and enduring American myth. Through the skillful application of historical archaeology and its synthesis with documentary and oral evidence, she has helped shatter this myth. The new findings, which show that southern Appalachians were not the isolated, backward people of legend, will help remove the stigma of inferiority attached to the Appalachian mountain folk and their descendants. This project comprises an unusually powerful demonstration of the value of archaeological research.

Audrey Horning has made and continues to make outstanding contributions to historical archaeology. By conducting first-rate research, wisely applying theory while still respecting evidence, and regularly sharing findings with the public, her work is an excellent example of historical archaeology and the untold stories it can reveal.

Henry M. Miller