

J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology



George L. Miller

George L. Miller is the recipient of the 2012 Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology. This award was presented to George at the SHA's annual conference in Baltimore, in recognition of his pioneering work, lifetime contributions, and dedication to scholarship in historical archaeology.

The Early Years in the “Old Northwest”

George was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1942. His early archaeological influences occurred while he was an undergraduate at Wayne State University in Detroit. His principal professors and mentors were the late Dr. Arnold Pilling and Dr. Gordon L. Grosscup. While at Wayne State, he had the opportunity to work with a number of other individuals at a variety of sites in the “Old Northwest.” His first archaeological job was in 1965 as an excavator for the University of Michigan, Museum of Anthropology at the Custer Road Dump site on Mackinac Island. This was followed by laboratory experience under Dr. Pilling and Dr. Grosscup at the Wayne State University Museum of Anthropology.

In 1966, 1967, and 1968, Miller served as the laboratory person for the great J. C. (“Pinky”) Harrington during the excavations at Nauvoo, Illinois, the town that the Mormons built in 1839 under the direction of Joseph Smith after being forced out of Missouri. The opportunity to work with “Pinky” and, equally important, Virginia Harrington had a great impact on George and forever colored the way he looks at archaeology. Between times, Miller had the chance to participate in a

site survey with Dr. James Fitting in southern New Mexico under the auspices of the University of Michigan, Museum of Anthropology and to excavate at the Walker Tavern site in Cambridge Junction, Michigan. He subsequently undertook the analysis of the ceramics from the tavern with Dr. Grosscup.

In 1969, Miller began a long-term research relationship with a site in Portage County, Ohio. The Franklin Glass Works occupied George through the spring of 1970. While initially the crew chief, Miller became director of excavations in September of 1969. He wrote a history of the glassworks (published in 1987) and began the study of the ceramics—ceramics that have been studied much longer than the mere nine years the site was in operation. One of the early fruits of this analysis was George's first published article: "Time Expended for Archaeological Excavations vs. Technical Analysis of Artifacts from the Franklin Glass Works Site, Kent, Ohio" (Miller 1971b). George started fighting for adequate lab budgets early. In the same year, Miller (1971a) published an article that explored mean ceramic dating with 19th-century ceramics. This was George's most "South"erly foray.

George Miller Goes South

In the spring of 1972, Miller got his first fulltime archaeological position. He was hired by the St. Mary's City Commission (now the Historic St. Mary's City Commission) to set up and establish the archaeological lab and create processes for the study and treatment of artifacts from Maryland's first capital. He was hired by Garry Wheeler Stone and found himself in an incredibly rich intellectual environment. On staff at that time were Dr. Cary Carson, Alexander H. Morrison II, Dr. Lois Carr, Dr. Lorena Walsh, and Dr. Russell Menard. Among the "summer help" were myself, Henry Miller, Joanne Bowen, Mike Smolek, and Robert Keeler. George has said that each day at work was an intellectual feast, interacting with people who went on to revolutionize the entire area of "Chesapeake Studies." Miller directed the archaeology lab during the entire Watergate debacle. By his rule, the only radio that could be played in the lab had to be tuned to National Public Radio for the hearings.

While at St. Mary's City, George published his study of 19th-century ceramics from the Tole-Tabbs site, "A Tenant Farmer's Tableware: Nineteenth-Century Ceramics from Tabb's Purchase" (Miller 1974). Miller wrote, but did not publish, his first study of blue-edged earthenware with the wonderful topic sentence: "Who were the Blue Edgeware People?" At St. Mary's, George created the laboratory processes still used there, began an artifact conservation program, and introduced the staff to the idea of ceramic-vessel analysis, stressing that people used pots, not pieces. Also during this time, he began researching ceramic supply in the isolated Ohio Western Reserve, on which he published with Silas Hurry in 1983. In 1976, Miller celebrated the bicentennial of American independence by immigrating to Canada.

George Goes North

The cause of George's migration to Canada was to take a new job with Parks Canada in Ottawa, Ontario. Miller was employed as a material culture researcher under the direction of Olive Jones in the Glass Section. While there, he had the opportunity to work with Olive, Catherine Sullivan, and others on the *Parks Canada Glass Glossary* (Jones and Sullivan 1985), still the bible of glass-artifacts studies. Three other publications on glass and ceramics came from Miller's time at Parks Canada (Miller and Sullivan 1981; Miller and Pacey 1985; Miller and Jorgenson 1986). George has said that going to work at Parks Canada at that time was like attending a conference every day, surrounded by a range and wealth of material culture specialists. Miller also received a six-month fellowship to the Winterthur Museum, where he undertook a study of the Philadelphia ceramics and glass merchant George M. Coates, who was in business from 1817 to 1831 (Miller 1984). Following the fellowship, he organized a conference on marketing ceramics in North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. Five papers from that conference were subsequently published in

Winterthur Portfolio in 1984. Most notably, the research led to the 1980 publication of Miller's seminal study "Classification and Economic Scaling of 19th Century Ceramics" in *Historical Archaeology* (Miller 1980). This article has been reprinted both in Mary Beaudry's 1988 edited volume, *Documentary Archaeology*, and the SHA reader *Approaches to Material Culture Research for Historical Archaeologists* (Miller et al. 1991).

George Takes Williamsburg

In 1983, George Miller was lured back into the United States with a new job offer. This new position was as senior laboratory analyst under the direction of Dr. Marley Brown III. His work at Colonial Williamsburg involved helping to revise their computer cataloging system, improving the dating of artifacts, reviewing the analysis of reports, and teaching students. He was awarded two grants while at Colonial Williamsburg and completed major research projects on ceramic prices, index values, and chronologies. Miller also worked with numerous students writing their master's theses at the College of William and Mary.

During this period, Miller authored, coauthored, or contributed to 12 research articles, including "The Second Destruction of the *Geldermalsen*" (1987c). This article, which questioned the ethics of a museum dealing with underwater treasure hunters, was a significant contribution and a brave position to take when you are employed by one of the museums purchasing Chinese porcelain from the *Geldermalsen*. That article was subsequently reprinted twice by other journals, including the *Bermuda Journal of Archaeology and Maritime History* in 1990 and *Historical Archaeology* in 1992. Miller maintained a hectic pace of publication, both as a solo author and as a collaborative author. In 1986, George published "Of Fish and Sherds: A Model for Estimating Vessel Counts" in *Historical Archaeology* and, in 1987, "Origins of Josiah Wedgwood's Pearlware" in *Northeast Historical Archaeology*.

George Miller was awarded a two-year grant in December 1985 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) entitled "English Ceramics in America, 1760 to 1860: Marketing, Prices, and Availability." He directed two researchers working with merchants' records from Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Williamsburg. As part of his research, George spent three months in Staffordshire working in the Wedgwood, Spode, and Minton archives.

Miller received a grant from Garrow and Associates of Atlanta, Georgia, in September of 1985 for research on the Staffordshire potters' price-fixing list of 1814. He was also awarded a three-month Winterthur Research Fellowship to the Winterthur Museum in Delaware in the fall of 1989. The research focused on defining the "market basket" of ceramics commonly available in country stores from 1780 to 1880. In 1990, Miller and Hunter published "English Shell Edged Earthenware: Alias Leeds Ware, Alias Feather Edge" in *Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Wedgwood International Seminar*. In 1991, Miller received a six-month NEH/Winterthur Fellowship to the Winterthur Museum from July through December 1991 to continue this research.

The year 1991 saw publication of "A Revised Set of CC Index Values for Classification and Economic Scaling of English Ceramics from 1787 to 1880" in *Historical Archaeology* (Miller 1991a), which was subsequently reprinted in the second edition of *Approaches to Material Culture Research for Historical Archaeologists* (Brauner 2000) and later translated into Portuguese in 2009.

That same year, Miller began publishing a series of brief articles in the newsletter of the Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology (CNEHA) under the title: "Thoughts Towards a User's Guide to Ceramic Assemblages." The four-part series included "Part I: Lumping Sites into Mega-assemblages by Those That Cannot Tell Time" (Miller 1991b), "Part II: What Does This Assemblage Represent?" (Miller 1991c), "Part III: Breaking Archaeological Assemblages into Functional Groups" (Miller 1992), and finally "Part IV: Some Thoughts on Classification of White Earthenwares" (Miller 1993). These papers, which provide timeless guidance for material culture analysts focusing on ceramics, are available on the CNEHA website, <<http://www.cneha.org/newsletters/millerguide.pdf>>.

George in Delaware

In 1992, George Miller began a foray into the cultural resource management (CRM) world. He was employed as a material culture researcher by the Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Delaware under the direction of Dr. Jay Custer. While at the center, he created a computer catalog for glass and ceramic vessels, set up a computerized numbering system for the inventory control of artifacts from historical-period sites, and analyzed the artifacts from four sites ranging in date from the late 17th century into the early 20th century. His work involved training catalogers, historical archaeologists, and students. While at Delaware, Miller published with Rob Hunter “English Shell-Edged Earthenware” in *Antiques Magazine* (Hunter and Miller 1994).

In March 1993, George was awarded a one-year NEH grant, entitled “English and American Ceramics, 1846–1917: Prices, Index Values, and Chronology,” which was an extension of his earlier work on ceramic prices. Much of this research subsequently fed into the article “War and Pots” (Miller and Earls 2008). In 1994, Miller and collaborators Ann Smart Martin and Nancy S. Dickinson published “Changing Consumption Patterns: English Ceramics and the American Market from 1770 to 1840” in *Everyday Life in the Early Republic*, published by the Winterthur Museum.

George in the Corporate World

In 1994, Miller left the quasi-commercial/quasi-academic world of the University of Delaware for the corporate world. He became the laboratory director for the archaeology section of URS Corporation in Burlington, New Jersey, where he remained until his retirement in 2008. He oversaw the artifact analysis for many CRM projects and continued to inspire and direct students. During this period, Miller authored or coauthored eight publications and began his deep involvement with the journal *Ceramics in America*. Miller had worked closely with Rob Hunter while at Colonial Williamsburg, and more collaborations continued. Significant articles from this period include his “All in the Family: A Staffordshire Soup Plate and the American Market” (Hunter and Miller 2001) and “How Creamware Got the Blues: The Origins of China Glaze and Pearlware” (Miller and Hunter 2001).

Miller continued collaborating and publishing in a range of venues. “Telling Time for Archaeologists,” published in 2000 in *Northeast Historical Archaeology* with contributions by Patricia Samford, Ellen Shlasko, and Andrew Madsen, exemplifies George’s penchant for meticulous research and is a “must read” for anyone conducting material culture analysis. This article led to a series of posters produced by URS for CNEHA.

While at URS, Miller worked closely with Terry Klein and Meta Janowitz. George and Meta were noted for their spirited discussions concerning pottery in its many forms. George and Terry collaborated on the important article: “A System for Ranking the Research Potential of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Farmstead Archaeology in the Northeast” (Miller and Klein 2002). In this article, Miller and Klein proposed ways of evaluating the research potential of a ubiquitous type of site frequently found but seldom studied. Miller also returned, somewhat, to his roots, investigating the evolution of machine-made bottles.

In 1997, during his “URS period,” George Miller collected his most significant “dish,” his wife Amy Earls. Amy’s friends assumed she had always wanted her own toby jug. George and Amy are both ceramics wizards who have also collaborated on significant publications.

George in Retirement

Retirement has found George Miller as active as when officially working. In 2008, he and Amy published a highly significant article entitled “War and Pots” in *Ceramics in America* (Miller and Earls 2008). The original paper had been presented at the 2007 Society for Historical Archaeology conference held in Williamsburg, Virginia. The essential thesis of this study is that external events led to major economic results, which can be seen in ceramics availability, selection, and use. This has been a reoccurring subtext in many of George’s broader-scale investigations—seeing

the big questions through the lens of broken pots. Pots are what archaeologists find, but people are what we want to study.

The year 2009 saw the publication with Rob Hunter of “Suitable for Framing: Decorated Shell-Edge Earthenware” in *Early American Life* (Hunter and Miller 2009). This article reached a very wide, popular audience, discussing what was an extremely common ceramic type that had first caught George’s attention early in his career when he asked: “Who were the blue edgeware people?”

George’s recent research has included more study of the advent of machine-made bottles and recent exploration of the production, cost, and distribution of cobalt, perhaps the most significant material used in the decoration of ceramics. Did cobalt cost affect how the potters decorated their wares? Wait until he publishes the article and be amazed.

George is also investigating a privateer prize cargo seized during the War of 1812 and auctioned off in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1813. It was not the ship that interested George, but rather the cargo. It included 250 crates of “Liverpool Ware” and assorted linens. The auction catalog contained a great amount of detail about the contents of those 250 crates that allowed Miller to analyze the assemblage much as he would an archaeological site, albeit one much better described and documented than anything found in the ground. So George is continuing to investigate the economic context of the War of 1812, a subject which also figured in his study with Amy of “War and Pots.”

Mentoring Students and Reaching Out to the Public

One of George Miller’s major and prolonged contributions has been in mentoring students who have matured into colleagues. George has been instrumental in directing students into research into the past that is not driven by the *au courant* theory. Several dissertations and theses have benefited from Miller’s insights and enthusiasm, in spite of his never having a full-time academic job or an advanced degree. George worked directly with undergraduates at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, undergraduates and graduate students at the College of William and Mary, a range of students at the University of Delaware, and most recently, graduate students at Temple University. Of course, many of these students went on for even more advanced studies, and they could depend on Miller to support them, push them farther than they wanted to go, and to provide insight that only comes with experience and dedication. Among the many students George mentored, many are now our colleagues. Just to mention a few, Ann Smart Martin, Patricia Samford, Nancy Dickinson, Ellen Shlasko, Meredith M. Poole, Andrew Madsen, Esther White, Robert Hunter, Mara Kaktins, Tony McNichol, and myself all benefited from our association with George.

With his many presentations of his seminar entitled “An Introduction to English Ceramics,” George Miller has reached diverse audiences, ranging from college students to government agencies, professional organizations, and environmental and contract firms. George has given this presentation 60 times in 22 states. Venues have included 14 colleges and universities, 4 museums, 8 professional organizations, and 5 environmental and cultural resource firms.

George Miller has also reached out to the glass- and ceramics-collectors’ world, where he has tried to move enthusiasts from the worship of “style” to an understanding of the underlying causal economics. His articles in the *Proceedings of the Wedgwood International Seminar*, *Antiques Magazine*, and *Ceramics in America* have brought the same rigor of research to new specialized and popular audiences.

George and his “Pun”ishing use of Language

George has long had a way with words. Some specific observations ensconced in his publications include “How Creamware Got the Blues” (Miller and Hunter 2001); “Pearlware did not replace creamware, decoration replaced creamware” (Miller and Earls 2008); “pearlware, that pigment of our imagination” (Miller and Earls 2008); and “Ode to a Lunch Bowl” (Miller 1986). George has always known how language can be used to advance a point or blunt an assault. He once spoke of “simple reductionist archaeology” and then added that he feared he had strayed “far south of his topic.”

Sometimes Miller's wit has focused on the nature of the profession, specifically the pursuit of archaeology for profit and those who cut corners to achieve that end. George has imagined a CRM firm named Will, Bidlow, and Dolittle, Inc., whose corporate slogan is: "So the Present Can Earn from the Past." He actually envisioned the entire staff, which included the lithics specialist named Debby Tage and a business manager named Hiram Cheap.

Sometimes George Miller does not make a joke, but does make a point: "Overproduction and the resulting falling prices drove changing consumption patterns, not consumer demand." George always appreciates the need to see past the theory to the reality of the data and is not shy in pointing this out when others do not.

Sartorial George

George Miller has always made an unusual statement in his choice of attire. George invented casual Friday and then extended it to the entire week. A colleague once said Miller looked like a Bavarian tuba player, but Bavarian tuba players do not commonly wear sandals. Many have tried to emulate his sense of style, but few have succeeded. I have been told that when attending the rather formal American Ceramic Circle meeting in Philadelphia that his co-presenters, Ann Smart Martin and Patricia Samford, had to take George shopping so he actually would have a tie. George subsequently demonstrated his familiarity with ties by laundering it with his new outfit, dyeing all the clothes pink. But clothes don't make the man. Miller's sartorial signature at first disarms. Then he opens his mouth and we are totally disarmed intellectually. If sandals and suspenders catch our attention, it is the mind that we remember.

George and the Society for Historical Archaeology

George Miller is a charter member of SHA and attended the first meeting of the precursor of the SHA in Dallas in 1967. George served on the executive board of SHA from 1980 to 1982 and on the editorial advisory committee from 1983 to 1995. Miller was instrumental in beginning the series "A Reader from Historical Archaeology" with publication of *Approaches to Material Culture Research for Historical Archaeologists* in 1991 (Miller et al. 1991). He has presented 19 papers at annual meetings, 7 of which have been published. He has authored or coauthored 10 articles that have been published in the journal and has three book reviews also published there. George has long been a gadfly and conscience to the organization, especially about keeping prices down so students can participate. In 1973, at the annual business meeting, Miller inquired about the high cost of the registration fee for the conference. Rick Sprague explained that the fee, \$12.50, was a result of the organization deciding it would no longer underwrite the expense of the banquet. It was Miller who taught me to always attend the business meeting—often the best theater and entertainment occurs in that *Robert's Rules of [dis]Order*—structured space.

Miller has been known to complain about the time of year we meet and the inclement weather that seems to follow us around. As detailed in a submission to the *SHA Newsletter*, George pointed out that in 1968 the second annual meeting, in Williamsburg, was beset with freezing rain; after the 1970 meeting in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, heavy snow made travel home dicey; and at the 1973 conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, participants experienced arctic temperatures. The 1976 meeting in Philadelphia concluded with freezing rain. In fact, I recall driving back to Baltimore and being directed onto the highway median by Pennsylvania state troopers because of road conditions. The 1979 Nashville meeting was preceded by bad weather, causing many to miss the first day's sessions. In 1983, while Denver, Colorado, was ready for heavy weather, the rest of the world was not, leading to massive delays getting home, and who can forget Cincinnati in 1996 when numerous people were snowed in for days? The latter meeting stimulated George's complaint. (I fortunately took the advice of a wise man that had grown up across the river in Kentucky and left a day early.) Subsequent memorable meetings, weatherwise, include Corpus Christi, Texas, with ice storms, and more recently the less-than-warm weather of Amelia Island, Florida. Miller

has suggested changing the time of year that SHA meets to something more appealing, but then we would all be on the beach like at the Kingston, Jamaica, conference in 1992. However, he always needs to remember that it was at an SHA conference in Washington, D.C., in 1995 that he met Amy—some good things do come from these conferences.

George Miller and the Discipline

From the birth of the discipline of historical archaeology with the Dallas meeting of 1967 through its maturation over the past 45 years, George Miller has contributed to our understanding of the past and has developed tools that measure in real ways the significance of artifacts. By stressing the use of potters' terminology and examining the value of decoration, Miller has grounded our studies of ceramics in a real world, not simply a collector's world. His long publication history and his willingness to teach students of all stripes have made a lasting contribution to our chosen area of study. George Miller has shown by example that understanding the past is not a simple mathematical equation but rather a thoroughgoing evaluation of data and what those data mean. George's outreach to many audiences demonstrates why we actually do archaeology. His ceramic seminars have reached countless students of material culture and broadened our audience in areas archaeologists seldom tread. His range of studies from ceramics to glass has enlightened the discipline and helped move our work into areas previously ignored. The "Telling Time" posters and his "Thoughts Towards a User's Guide to Ceramic Assemblages" have in clear English set standards for how archaeologists should think. His willingness to take on difficult subjects like the *Geldermalsen* has demonstrated a fierce determination to pursue what is right, not what is easy. In his retirement, Miller continues to contribute to historical archaeology. In my opinion, Pinky and Virginia Harrington would be proud.

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SILAS D. HURRY