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J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology

**JOHN L. COTTER**

1984



John L. Cotter was honored at the 1984 annual SHA meetings in Williamsburg, Virginia, as the second recipient to receive the Society's J. C. Harrington medal in recognition of his contributions to the field of historical archaeology.

Cotter's initial introduction to archaeology began at the University of Denver where he was awarded the A.B. degree in anthropology in 1934. During his Denver residence Cotter, a native Coloradan, participated in two significant prehistoric excavations. In 1934/35 he was a member of the Denver Museum of Natural History field crew at the Lindenmeier Paleo Indian site in western Colorado and remained for one additional season in 1935/36 under the direction of the Smithsonian Institution. Subsequently, Cotter was the chief of the research team which investigated the Clovis Type site under the sponsorship of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Cotter published some of the results of his work in two articles of the *Proceedings of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences* in 1937 and 1938. After receiving his M.A. at the University of Denver in 1935, Cotter enrolled

in the Anthropology Department at the University of Pennsylvania where he was influenced by Frank Speck and other members of the University Museum staff.

Cotter left Pennsylvania for a position as state supervisor of the archeological survey of Kentucky in 1938 and this work occupied him until 1940. In this capacity he gained valuable experience in the then blossoming field of governmental archaeology, knowledge which served Cotter well throughout his career. He entered the National Park Service in 1940 as an archaeologist/manager of Tuzigoot National Monument (a pueblo site) in Arizona and by this act began a nearly four decades of service in that agency. Cotter's duties there included maintenance, interpretation, research, and administration. When he led a tour, for example, it was necessary to close the small museum!

Cotter had met his wife, Virginia Wilkins Tomlin, at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, and their Tuzigoot experiences form some of their early marital memories. Virginia, trained as a classical scholar, responded well to the anthropologist's world and has prospered in it ever since.

During the Second World War, Cotter served in the 357th Infantry Regiment during the Normandy Invasion and later assisted in Army educational programs in London and Paris. After the conclusion of the war, he returned to the National Park Service as an archaeologist in charge of the Natchez Trace Parkway archaeological investigation program. This project involved the early utilization of developmental impact strategies and Cotter's survey of the Parkway mitigated the construction component of the park. Among the sites investigated by Cotter were the Bynum mounds, a complex of southern Hopewellian structures, and an historic Chickasaw settlement on the Trace. Cotter's exposure to the latter constituted his first experience on an historic site and began a career of specializing in such investigations. He also worked on the Emerald Mound, an extensive 13th century A.D. temple mound located near Natchez, Mississippi. Throughout this assignment, Cotter was successful in treating large scale survey archaeology as an integral part of development.

After a short term as acting Chief Archaeologist for the National Park Service in Washington, Cotter was placed in charge of the archaeological excavations at Jamestown, Colonial National Historical Park, from 1953-1957. Cotter's direction of this work was the most challenging archaeological assignment undertaken during his tenure with the National Park Service. Aably assisted by Edward Jelks, Joel Shiner, and others, Cotter proceeded from the earlier work of J. C. Harrington. Laboring under a tight time frame, Cotter excavated a sizeable portion of the town. This work stimulated a whole new generation of historical archaeologists and helped spur interest in tidewater Virginia archaeology.

Cotter's subsequent career with the National Park Service was one primarily concentrated on historical archaeology. As regional archaeologist for the Northeast and later the Mid-Atlantic Region, he championed the new field of study and was one of its most eloquent spokesmen. During the fifties, sixties, and seventies, Cotter formulated historical archaeological programs for the Park Service and worked hard to carry them to fruition. At the University of Pennsylvania, Cotter returned and finished his Ph.D. and began immediately to teach historical archaeology as a separate discipline. His first course, taught in 1960, must be considered as being among the first course of its kind offered in the United States. Cotter continued to teach this course in the American Civilization Department until his "full" retirement in 1979. We must place "full" in quotation marks since Cotter retired earlier in 1972 and then came back under the rubric of a "re-hired annuitant."

Cotter's academic work at the University of Pennsylvania centered on an anthropological approach to American Studies which in turn strongly influenced the American Civilization Department. His teaching generated twelve Ph.d. dissertations and about two dozen Master's theses. He has published over 100 articles and reviews on historical archaeology and anthropology. Additionally, as an ardent bibliographer, Cotter has assembled a vast listing of all works appropriate to the field since 1966. This project is currently being computerized and hopefully will be published. W. G. Hershey has aided Cotter in his effort for most of its recent history.

Cotter's support for the Society for Historical Archaeology as a co-founder, first president, and first editor, is well known. Throughout the history of the SHA, John Cotter has been an enthusiastic sponsor, member, and officer. John Cotter's career has demonstrated a broad based approach to cultural history. During the United States Bicentennial, for example, he published a widely distributed booklet entitled "Above Ground Archaeology." He has consistently supported a flexible stance for both historical archaeology and the study of American material culture. Because of this, and in consequence of his contributions to the study of historical archaeology, and because of his positive influence on two generations of historical archaeologists, he has been awarded the 1984 J. C. Harrington award for outstanding contributions to the field.