



## John L. Cotter Award in Historical Archaeology: John M. Chenoweth

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On 11 January 2019, John M. Chenoweth received the Society for Historical Archaeology's (SHA) John L. Cotter Award in Historical Archaeology (Fig. 1). Chenoweth received his Ph.D. from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2011, and joined the Anthropology Program at the University of Michigan-Dearborn in 2013, where he now holds the rank of associate professor. Chenoweth has made important contributions to the archaeology of the Caribbean and the archaeology of communities of faith, and he has worked toward developing new methodologies for understanding historical-period ceramics.

Chenoweth's (2011) doctoral work focused on a community of Quakers that established slaveholdings in the British Caribbean in the 18th and 19th centuries. This work resulted in the 2017 book, *Simplicity, Equality, and Slavery: An Archaeology of Quakerism in the British Virgin Islands, 1740–1780* (Chenoweth 2017b). In this work, Chenoweth examined how members of a community of faith navigated among the orthodoxies of their religion with the pragmatism of their economic lives. For Chenoweth, religion is about the everyday, the lived, and the practiced, and within the everyday come the opportunities for rescripting, reimagining, and reorienting what it is to be of good faith. Chenoweth explores how valued attributes, like “simplicity,” “pacifism,” and “egalitarianism,” were lived in the



**Fig. 1** John M. Chenoweth. (Photo by Andy Greenwell, 2019.)

seemingly contradictory context of being rum producers and slaveholders.

His work challenges the widely held notions that Quakers were always abolitionists, and, instead, through his archaeological analyses, he demonstrates the ways

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that differences between the material lives of the enslaved peoples enhanced the Quakers' understandings of themselves as distinct from both Black captives and other White planters. It is striking, upon reading Chenoweth's work, to think about how seldom historical archaeologists grapple with the subject of faith and religion in the everyday, despite the long-enduring role that religion has played in the development of what has become the United States. It is relevant and important work.

Chenoweth also distinguishes himself as a supportive collaborator and colleague. In addition to his British Virgin Islands book, he has two edited volumes and a number of peer-reviewed journal articles, including an interdisciplinary article in the flagship journal *American Anthropologist* (Chenoweth 2014). In particular, *Archaeologies of Freedom and Slavery in the Caribbean: Exploring the Spaces In Between*, coedited with Lynsey Bates and James Delle (Bates et al. 2016), is a wonderful volume that brings together not just established scholars of the Caribbean, but also the next generation of scholars in the field. It is a volume that demonstrates the intellectual directions Caribbean archaeology can be expected to take in the next decade. Importantly, the volume, just as Chenoweth's solo-authored book does, broadens the archaeological gaze from the large slaveholding islands of the Caribbean to include smaller, economically marginalized islands during both the periods of enslavement and freedom. As archaeologists, our chronological gaze has too rarely considered the experiences of freed and postcolonial Caribbean populations, and Chenoweth's growing corpus of work, as an author, editor, and collaborator, is working to address that shortcoming.

Chenoweth has also shown his commitment to the idea that archaeology is deeply relevant in the contemporary world, not only as it explores long-term roots of present problems, but as it engages with the present directly in the relatively new field of "contemporary archaeology." He has engaged in several contemporary projects, applying archaeological perspectives and techniques to the modern world, and has been a part of a growing movement among members of SHA to incorporate such studies of the recent past with related work, including organizing sessions and presenting results at SHA conferences. Chenoweth's most notable accomplishment in this area to date is his second *American Anthropologist* article (Chenoweth 2017a), which explores the lines between concepts of "nature" and "culture" by moving between contemporary artifacts in

Yosemite National Park in California and the city of Detroit, Michigan. The work shows the way modern people cast certain types of objects as being natural in a way that reinforces memory and community, yet also recognizes the tacit and oppressive role of race in the construction of the idea of the natural.

In addition to academic outputs, Chenoweth has been a dedicated teacher, developing a pedagogy that emphasizes hands-on research and community engagement in projects both local and faraway. The British Virgin Islands research was notable for the wide range of stakeholders that helped shape and was brought into the development and implementation of the project. The work behind the excavations speaks to SHA's commitment to ethically engaged archaeological practices. John has also been a dedicated contributor to the service needs of the Society for Historical Archaeology. Since 2006 he has been a member of the SHA Development Committee, serving several years as chair, as well as serving on the SHA Nominations and Elections Committee. His work on the SHA-published *Historical Archaeology Laboratory Handbook* (Chenoweth 2016) deserves note as well. This update of several successful collections makes foundational pieces available in one place for the first time. The substantial three-volume set ranges from the theoretical to the practical.

In his teaching, service, and, particularly, his research, John Chenoweth has demonstrated his credentials to stand among the other outstanding historical archaeologists who have received the honor of the John L. Cotter Award.

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