

MEMORIAL

Bert Salwen, 1920–1988

Bert Salwen, Professor of Anthropology at New York University and considered by many to be the “father” of urban archaeology, died unexpectedly on Christmas Day 1988, in his Greenwich Village home. He was 68 years old. Bert will be remembered as a pioneer, in a new archaeological field. He will also be remembered for his personal characteristics, for his love of archaeology, for his modesty and integrity, his honesty, humor, and lack of pretension, and for his warmth.

At the time of his death, Salwen was deeply involved in New York University's joint program in history and historical archaeology which he had created. It is one of the few genuinely interdisciplinary programs in this field, and although relatively new, its students have already produced a number of Master's theses and PhD dissertations. Salwen was also in the final stage of completing a report on the first major archaeological excavation in Greenwich Village, the Sullivan Street site, analyzing the artifactual material and documentary evidence from the Village's first, suburban phase of development.

Salwen compressed a great deal of archaeology into a 30-year second career. His first profession was that of engineer; he worked in aircraft and machine design and as a contractor for 15 years. His engineering background was useful to him later on, and was always visible in his drafting, his meticulous fieldwork, and his comfort with straightforward, basic quantitative analysis. But Bert became fascinated with archaeology, as an amateur, and in 1957 entered the Columbia University PhD program in the Department of Anthropology.

In a recent interview, Salwen acknowledged that William Duncan Strong had the greatest influence on his intellectual development at Columbia; this can be seen in Salwen's later interest in the Contact period, and in his concern with archaeological field technique. Strong was responsible for Bert's first professional field work experience, as an assistant to Carlyle Smith, working in South Dakota. Richard Woodbury, Ralph Solecki, and Morton Fried were also important academic influences at Columbia. Jacques Bordaz and Jerome Jacobson were studying archaeology there during the same period of time.

His first full-time faculty position was at Bennington College, where Salwen taught for three years. In 1966 he went to New York University to join a new department that was being organized with a focus on Urban Anthropology. He was Director of Graduate Studies at NYU for many years, and served as Acting Chair for several years. He was committed to field training as an essential part of the archaeology program and taught a summer field class for 21 of the 25 summers between 1962 and 1987, with spring and/or fall classes in some of those years also. Although he concentrated his field research in New York, he did fieldwork in 10 other states (including Alaska), plus the District of Columbia. Students who participated in these field schools will always remember his fierce insistence on technical excellence, the familial quality (and fun) of group life, and his harmonica playing.

Salwen was committed to students. This can be seen in the many papers he wrote with them. He was always teaching archaeology, formally or informally, and his enthusiasm gave him a Pied Piper quality that is probably responsible for a number of careers in archaeology. He taught graduate, undergraduate, and high school students, and when he was a consultant to the United States Department of the Interior he designed and taught basic archaeology training programs for non-archaeologist federal managers. These are still being taught today, following his guidelines.

Salwen's first and continuing research interest was the prehistoric Northeastern United States. His dissertation integrated Rhodes Fairbridge's work on post-Pleistocene sea level changes with data from a series of archaeological sites, in order to address archaeological site formation processes. It remains a standard reference in coastal studies. He wrote extensively about the period of European-Indian contact in southern New England (cf., *The Handbook of North American Indians* 15, 1978), and conducted

excavations at Fort Shantok, Connecticut, and Fort Ninigret, Rhode Island. As an archaeologist who was committed to the salvage of information from threatened sites, and who became involved in local projects, it was probably inevitable that Salwen began to work in urban settings. In 1970 he excavated the remains of the original Dutch stockade in Kingston, New York, and after that worked in a variety of cities, in a series of projects around historic houses (The Wyckoff House, the Van Campen Inn, the Adriance House, and the Vander-Ende Onderdonk site, to name just a few). He also observed the urban research of archaeologists in such cities as New York, San Francisco, Boston, Atlanta, and Albany, and consulted with many scholars from abroad in a wide range of cities in Europe, Great Britain, and Asia. He began to think about the nature of urban archaeology and the contribution that archaeologists could make to the understanding of cities. He considered both pragmatic and theoretical issues: What were the limits of the urban site (building, block, or city)? Should we simply be doing archaeology *in* the city or should we try to do the archaeology *of* the city? What kinds of materials could be included in urban archaeological analysis and did they all have to come from below the ground?

Salwen began to learn history, taking courses in historiography and archival research. He also wrote about the distinction between method and theory, noting that too much of archaeology was simply method and technique, and that as such it was equivalent to ethnography, being essentially descriptive. He suggested that our theory should come from anthropology, history, and other social sciences, allowing us to generate significant research questions related to the processes and phenomena of urban settlement. He and his students have been very involved in urban excavations, particularly in New York City. He was always willing to share his extensive knowledge and experience in urban settings with others doing similar research and was involved in many panel discussions on the conduct of urban archaeology.

Almost from the beginning of his career as an archaeologist Salwen was concerned with the accelerating rate of destruction of the archaeological record. He expressed his concern in several ways. As an individual he was an outstanding spokesman for archaeological resources, communicating problems and precipitating action in a variety of contexts, through his enthusiasm and insight. He was also active in many organizations involved with environmental protection legislation at federal, state, and local levels. He worked as a consultant to the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Department of Interior, helping to develop federal policy, writing guidelines and regulations, and developing standards for archaeological research.

He also participated in, and in many cases, helped to found a number of archaeological organizations dedicated to preservation. In 1980–1981, he served as President-Elect and President of the Society for Historical Archaeology, during which time the Harrington Medal was struck and issued for the first time. He also served as president (and was a founding member) of the New York Archaeological Council, and Professional Archaeologists of New York City. He was one of the incorporating directors of the Society for Professional Archaeologists and a Senior Director of the National Preservation Institute. He was also a board member of the Coordinating Council of National Archaeological Societies, the Association for Field Archaeology, the Council of Northeastern Historical Archaeology, and the Society for Ethnohistory. In 1983 he was awarded the Annual Conservation Award from ASCA. He was an active member of many organizations: (AAA, SAA, AAAS, the New York Academy of Sciences, the New York State Archaeological Association, and a number of other state and local organizations.

Salwen is survived by his wife Sarah Bridges, an archaeologist; five children, Peter, Nancy, Joshua, Ethan, and Sarah Frances; and a grandson, James.

Nan A. Rothschild

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