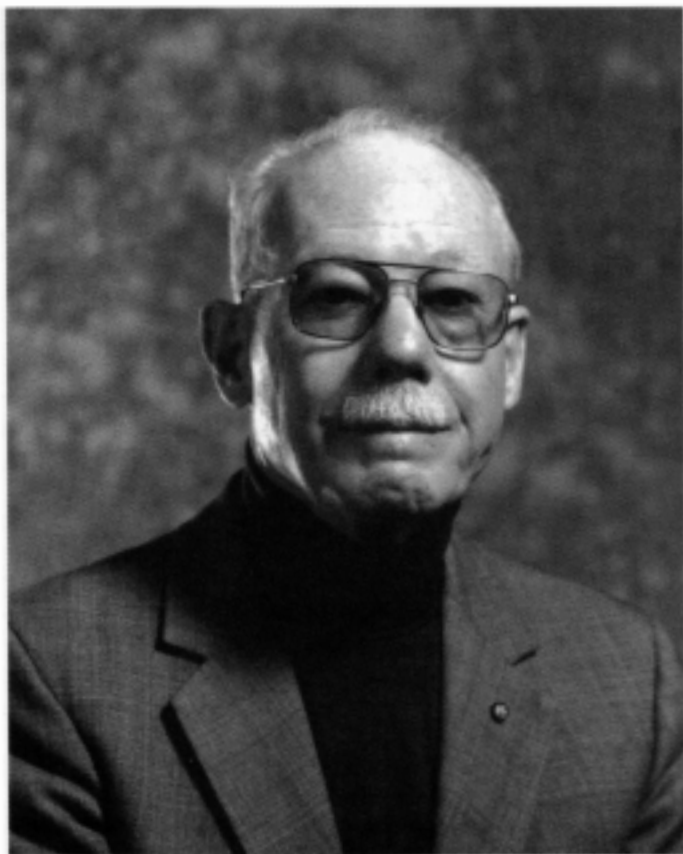


## Memorial



JOHN L. COTTER, 1911-1999

John L. Cotter, one of the pioneers of North American historical archaeology, died on 5 February 1999 after a short battle with lymphoma. He had celebrated his 87th birthday two months prior to his passing and his 58th wedding anniversary the day before. He is survived by his wife, Virginia Tomlin Cotter, a daughter, Jean Spaans, a son, Laurence, three grandsons and one great-granddaughter.

John Lambert Cotter was born on 6 December 1911, in Denver, Colorado, the only surviving offspring of John Aloysius Cotter and Bertha Becker Cotter. He was christened John Aloysius Cotter, Jr., but later (1936) legally changed his middle name to Lambert. His father had a job installing PBXs (private branch exchanges) throughout the west, thus young "Jack," as he was called in those days, moved many times in his early years. Between 1912 and 1930, he variously lived and went to school in Denver; Butte, Helena, and Livingston, Montana; Spokane, Washington; and La Mesa, California. In June 1930, John graduated from East Denver High School (where he was a classmate of H. Marie Wormington) as a National Honor Society student. He had also been the editor of his high school newspaper "The Spotlight," and this experience led him to his first paying job, working the night shift in the summer of 1930 for the Associated Press at the Rocky Mountain News office in Denver. At this point in his life, John had every expectation of pursuing journalism as a career but, as fate would have it, this was not to be.

In September 1930, with a one-half year tuition scholarship in hand, John enrolled at the University of Denver where he began coursework in English and journalism. He soon began to sour on

journalism as a career and, by chance, took a course or two in anthropology. At that time, the Anthropology Department at the University of Denver consisted of one man, E. B. Renaud. Renaud ran an archaeological field school every summer in the Santa Fe area, and John enrolled in the summers of 1932 and 1933. By the beginning of his second field school season, the archaeology "bug" had bitten and John switched his major to anthropology. In 1934 he was awarded his Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology. That summer, he got his first paying job in "archaeology," working in Weld County, Colorado at a fossil bed excavation for the Colorado Museum of Natural History. He also continued his studies and was awarded the Master of Arts degree in anthropology from the University of Denver in June 1935. His thesis, *Yuma and Folsom Artifacts*, is essentially a treatise on the then-known distributions of Paleoindian artifact types in the Rocky Mountain west.

During this period John met Jesse D. Figgins, Director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History. In the summer of 1935, Figgins asked John if he would head a field party for the Colorado Museum of Natural History at the Lindenmeier Site, a Folsom site located in Larimer County, Colorado. Here, John worked alongside Frank H. H. Roberts, who was in charge of another field party at Lindenmeier under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution. Through his acquaintance with Roberts, he met other well-known archaeologists and anthropologists, including Edgar B. Howard and Frank Speck, both from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. With the help of Speck, John landed a Harrison Fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, and he enrolled there in the fall of 1935 to pursue his doctorate in anthropology as an unpaid graduate assistant to Speck, taking courses with both Speck and A. Irving Hallowell.

In the summer of 1936, Howard asked John if he would head up an excavation at the Clovis type-site, and John readily said "yes." So, together with C. T. R. Bohannon, John drove to New Mexico from Philadelphia in Bohannon's 1928 Ford roadster to work at Clovis, where he served as chief-of-party in Howard's absence. He wound up the field season of 1936 back at Lindenmeier working with the Smithsonian party, and completed a second field season at Clovis in the summer of 1937 under Howard's direction. Upon his return to Penn that fall, Howard magnanimously asked John if he would like to write up the results of the two field seasons at Clovis. This led to John's first professional publication, a report on the 1936 field season entitled "The Occurrence of Flints and Extinct Animals in Pluvial Deposits Near Clovis, New Mexico," published in 1937 in the *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*. It was followed by a report on the 1937 field season, published in the same *Proceedings* in 1938. It was also during this period that John met Virginia Wilkins Tomlin, Howard's secretary, who was later to become John's wife.

Meanwhile, John had completed his doctoral coursework at Penn, took his oral examinations and, in his own words, "busted them flat" (Roberts 1999:13). Through his connections with Jesse Figgins, who by then had moved to Lexington, Kentucky, John was offered a job working for William S. Webb under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Kentucky. John accepted, and in the winter of 1937 he moved to Lexington. Shortly after his arrival, John was sent to Island, Kentucky, where he headed up a crew of about 40 out-of-work coal miners excavating a small burial mound. By the fall of 1938, John had been named State Supervisor of the Survey, and he moved back to Lexington where, working with William G. Haag, his job was to coordinate as many as 250 men on 11 WPA field teams excavating sites throughout Kentucky. He also traveled at least once to the WPA office in Washington to hand-process the paperwork necessary to keep the Kentucky projects going, and to keep the men on the crews continuously employed.

In early 1940, John was told that a Civil Service application he had submitted in 1936 had been accepted, and he took a job with the National Park Service that, in various positions and assignments, was to last for the better part of four decades. His first assignment was at Tuzigoot National Monument in Clarkdale, Arizona where he was placed in charge of the archaeological collection, interpretation, and conservation as a "lone post custodian." On 4 February 1941, John Cotter and Virginia Wilkins Tomlin were married in Prescott, Arizona, and set up housekeeping in a small

apartment that was part of the museum premises at Tuzigoot. In March 1943, the Cotters' first child, Jean, was born in Jerome, Arizona. John continued his work at Tuzigoot, spending much of his time with National Youth Administration (NYA) youngsters reconstructing and stabilizing the walls of the ruins there. In the fall of 1943, John was inducted into the U.S. Army.

After sending his wife and young daughter home to Philadelphia where they stayed with Virginia's mother and father, John spent 17 weeks in infantry training at Camp Roberts, California. Upon completion of infantry training, John was assigned to Company F, 357th Infantry Regiment of the 90th Division and sent to Exmoor, Devon, where staging for the invasion of Europe was held. Six days after the initial Normandy invasion, John's regiment was deployed into action on-shore, and several days later he was badly wounded in the left leg, for which he was later awarded the Purple Heart. After a period of rehabilitation in England, John continued his military service in the Armed Forces Institute in Paris, where his duties consisted of training instructors how to instruct others. This was followed by a full year in London at the Armed Forces Institute-European Theater of Operations, where he worked on the staff that processed the correspondence of GIs in the field who were trying to complete their schooling. Upon completion of his military service in December 1945, John returned home, where he resumed his National Park Service career at Tuzigoot.

After spending more than a year back at Tuzigoot, and presiding over the birth of his second child, Laurence, at Cottonwood, Arizona, John was transferred in July 1947 to the Natchez Trace Parkway at Tupelo, Mississippi. As Archeologist-in-Charge, he worked at the Hopewellian Bynum Site with John M. Corbett, with whom he later co-authored a major report entitled *Archeology of the Bynum Mounds, Mississippi*, published by the National Park Service in 1951. John also worked at Emerald Mound, the Gordon Site, the Mangum Site, and on a Chickasaw burial during this period, and published several reports of his findings. These reports, for the most part, were completed between 1949 and 1951.

In July 1951, the Cotters moved to Bladensburg, Maryland after John was assigned as Acting Chief Archeologist of the National Park Service in Washington, ironically taking Corbett's place in that role while the latter finished his military service. John served in this position for two years, during which time he was principally involved with policy-making for the Park Service. He also managed to get in a bit of field time during this stint, when he took annual leave in 1952 to excavate at the Van Cortland Manor House on the Hudson River for John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Aside from his earlier excavation of the Chickasaw burial at Natchez Trace, this was John's first hands-on experience in historical archaeology.

In July 1953, John was transferred to Colonial National Historical Park, where he was assigned as Chief Archeologist of excavations at Jamestown in anticipation of the 350th anniversary of that settlement in 1957. In this role, John followed in the footsteps of J. C. "Pinky" Harrington, who had excavated at Jamestown for several seasons in the 1930s and 1940s. At Jamestown, John worked with Edward B. Jelks, Joel Shiner, B. Bruce Powell, J. Paul Hudson, and Louis R. Caywood, among others. It was during this period that the Cotters bought their first house, in Williamsburg, in 1954. In all, John excavated approximately seven miles of trenches at Jamestown, and authored or co-authored several publications on the results, culminating in the publication of *Archeological Excavations at Jamestown, Virginia*, produced by the National Park Service in 1958. The Archeological Society of Virginia published an updated version of his monograph in 1994, and it was this pioneering work at Jamestown in the 1950s that launched John on his way in the newly emerging sub-discipline of historical archaeology.

In July 1957, John was transferred yet again, this time back "home" to Philadelphia, where he was named Regional Archeologist of the Northeast Region. Shortly after his arrival in Philadelphia and some 20 years after his initial departure, John became acquainted with Loren Eiseley, who was on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. With Eiseley's encouragement, in the fall of 1957 and at the age of 46, John once again enrolled in Penn's doctoral program. Utilizing weekends, evenings, and leave time to full advantage, John took courses with Alfred Kidder, Ward Goodenough, and Irving Hallowell, who was still at Penn 20 years after John last took coursework with him in 1937. In June 1959, having completed his new suite of courses, passed his oral examinations, and

revised his Jamestown publication to be accepted as his dissertation, John was awarded his Ph.D. in anthropology.

Meanwhile, John was still pursuing his full-time career with the Park Service. In this role, he administered dozens of archaeological projects in the Park Service's Northeast Region, which covered nearly one-third of the country, from Virginia to Maine, and Michigan to Missouri. Under John's administration such noted northeastern archaeologists as Jacob Gruber, Barbara Liggett, Vincent Foley, Herbert C. Kraft, Daniel G. Crozier, Edward S. Rutsch, and W. Fred Kinsey III worked under contract in various Park Service holdings in the Northeast Region. Being headquartered in Philadelphia, much of John's attention was focused on Independence National Historical Park, and he conducted or administered numerous archaeological investigations there over a period of more than a decade.

Shortly after he received his doctorate the irrepressible Cotter began another chapter in his life, one that later was to bring him further recognition as one of the pioneering founders of North American historical archaeology. In 1960, Anthony Garvan, who was on the Penn faculty in the Department of American Civilization, invited John to teach a course in historical archaeology. This course, variations of which John taught (or occasionally co-taught with David G. Orr) for 19 years, is now widely recognized as the first course in historical archaeology taught in an American university. It also included field sessions at some of the notable historic landmarks in the Philadelphia region, including Valley Forge, Fort Mifflin, and several locally significant historic houses, estates, and institutions. One of these field sessions resulted in a 1988 publication co-authored with one of John's students and two of his colleagues entitled *The Walnut Street Prison Workshop*. Amazingly, John was able to juggle his teaching with his full-time Park Service job, largely by taking annual leave from the Park Service and conducting field sessions on weekends and whenever he could fit them in. Several well-established historical archaeologists, including Betty Cosans-Zebooker, Paul Huey, and Garry Wheeler Stone, among others, were first introduced to historical archaeology through John's classes. Ironically, John did not believe he was a very good teacher, saying in a recent interview (Roberts 1999:39) "the fact of it is that I was a rotten teacher. . . ." Modesty was one of John's most endearing character traits and in spite of his contention, legions of former students and colleagues would respectfully but adamantly disagree with this self-effacing appraisal.

During the 1960s John found time to engage in several other professional activities, his demanding schedules at the Park Service and at Penn notwithstanding. In 1962 he began work on a bibliography of historic sites archaeology which, in its initial version, was published in microfiche by University Microfilms, Inc. in 1966. This bibliography was greatly expanded over the years with the help of William D. Hershey, Roderick Sprague, and Ronald L. Michael, and it can now be found on line at the SHA's website. John also found time during this period to produce a little-known but extremely useful booklet entitled *Handbook for Historical Archaeology, Part I*, privately published by John in 1968. This booklet provided a compendium of information on artifact types that the archaeologist was likely to encounter on historic archaeological sites. Much to his everlasting regret, he never found the time to follow up this initial effort with "Part II." John also found time in the mid-to-late 1960s to have a major hand in the founding of The Society for Historical Archaeology. Indeed, he was the first president of the society and the second editor of the journal *Historical Archaeology*. He also produced a small booklet entitled *Above Ground Archaeology*, published in 1974. This booklet was written to promote an appreciation for artifacts and memorabilia by the American public.

In 1977, after a 35-year career interrupted only by military service, John retired from the National Park Service. Given the Park Service's enduring penchant for periodic reorganization, and aside from his stints at Tuzigoot, Natchez Trace, and Jamestown, John served the NPS in several capacities, including Acting Chief Archeologist in Washington (1951-1953); Regional Archeologist, Northeast Region (1957-1970); Archeologist, Eastern U.S., Eastern Service Center (1970-1972); Archeologist, Denver Service Center, based in Philadelphia (1972-1974); and Regional Archeologist, Mid-Atlantic Region (1974-1977). In 1979, John officially retired from the faculty at Penn, having held the title of Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of American Civilization for 19 years. He also

held the title of Curator in American Historical Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania Museum from 1972 until 1980, and Curator Emeritus thereafter until his death. In the latter capacity John still maintained an office at Penn and worked half-days there, taking care of correspondence, writing, and counseling students until about a week before he died.

In 1983, Daniel G. Roberts and Michael Parrington joined forces with John and began work on *The Buried Past: An Archaeological History of Philadelphia*, ultimately published in 1992 by the University of Pennsylvania Press. This book synthesized all of the major historic archaeological research undertaken in the Philadelphia region through 1989, and built upon a little-known unpublished manuscript written by John in 1967 (Cotter 1967). The published book, while updated to include more than 20 years of additional archaeological research in Philadelphia, nevertheless bears the unmistakable *imprimatur* of John's earlier unpublished effort.

In addition to the books and monographs noted above, John published more than 130 articles and reviews on a wide variety of topics during his career. In his later years he was a regular contributor to *Archaeology Magazine's* Forum series. Based on the positive responses to *The Buried Past*, he and David Orr in 1994 began planning *The Archaeology of Great American Cities* series which, as the title implies, is to be a series of books on the archaeology of several American cities published by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Volumes for New York, Denver, Boston, Washington, St. Louis, Mexico City, and San Francisco were planned to be written by specialists and edited by Cotter and Orr. At the time of John's passing, the volume on Denver was nearing completion. In his later years John also took an interest in gerontology from an anthropological perspective; one of his last publications, appearing in the *Occasional Papers of the Association of Senior Anthropologists*, is entitled "Keeping in Focus Before and After Retirement." In keeping with this interest in gerontology, John served for several years as a member or officer of the resident's association council of the retirement community in Philadelphia where Virginia and he lived since 1984.

John was an active supporter of a great many professional organizations and societies throughout his career. He became a Charter Member of the Society for American Archaeology in 1935 and a Life Member of The Society for Historical Archaeology in 1984. He also became a member of the Society of Professional Archaeologists (SOPA) at a time when it was not fashionable to do so, and when he hardly needed the credential. He was an ardent supporter of the transformation of SOPA to the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA). He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Anthropological Association, a Stockholder in the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, and a Life Member of the Archaeological Institute of America. He also served as an editorial advisor for *Archaeology Magazine* from 1967 until his death. He was a Charter Member of the Society for Industrial Archaeology, and actively supported the National Trust for Historic Preservation and more than a dozen regional, state, and local organizations. In short, John deeply believed in his chosen profession and allied fields, and his long-term support of so many organizations amply demonstrated this commitment.

In recognition of his long and distinguished career, John was the recipient of numerous awards and honors. Among the most noteworthy are the J. Alden Mason Award of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology (1974); the Outstanding Service Award of the National Park Service (1977); the David E. Finley Award for Outstanding Achievement in Historic Preservation in the United States bestowed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (1978); the Out-of-State Archaeologist of the Year Award presented by the Archaeological Society of Virginia (1984); and the J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology of The Society for Historical Archaeology (Anonymous 1984). He was also honored by the publication of a *festschrift* 15 years ago (Orr and Crozier 1984) which brought together in one volume 11 papers by former students and colleagues. In celebration of his 80th birthday in 1991, John was the guest of honor at a symposium at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, entitled *Digging Philadelphia: The Archaeology of a City* in which several of his colleagues presented papers. Moreover, in recognition of his pioneering teaching achievements and for his "equally important life-long record of involvement with and enthusiastic support for each new

generation of people entering the discipline" (Schuyler 1999:2), The Society for Historical Archaeology named the John L. Cotter Award in Historical Archaeology in his honor at its 1999 annual meeting in Salt Lake City. Shortly after his death the National Park Service established an award in John's name "to recognize a specific archeological project within a unit of the National Park System, conducted by Park Service staff, permittee, or consultant, and guided by senior Park Service staff archeologist(s), each fiscal year . . ." (National Park Service 1999).

John's career came full-circle in a fitting way, almost as if he had choreographed it. Just three days after his death, on 8 February 1999, his last publication, *Clovis Revisited: New Perspectives on Paleoindian Adaptations from Blackwater Draw, New Mexico*, co-authored with Anthony T. Boldurian, went to press, bringing his career-long passion for Paleoindian manifestations in the Americas to completion. Remarkably, John was able to see a mock-up of the book's cover, since published by the University of Pennsylvania Museum in April 1999, only hours before he died. His comment on seeing the cover was "Marvelous!" (A. T. Boldurian pers. comm. 1999).

While John most certainly was deeply passionate about the past, he never lost sight of the relevance of both the present and future. In 1967, in the aforementioned unpublished monograph on Philadelphia's archaeology, he (Cotter 1967[Preface]:2) had this to say about perspective, in which he somewhat prophetically anticipated the post-processual heyday of the late 1980s and 1990s:

Perspective is heady stuff in this life and not for the good and easy man or matron who sees life as the same today, yesterday, and forever. . . . The products of the present are the archaeological specimens of the future, and all this growth and change in nation and city is a matter of history. Future centuries will further document the record (always reinterpreted by new generations in their own perspective) with archaeology. For artifacts and tastes and activities so revealed do not lie. The more accurately they are interpreted, the better the future can verify the past.

John was blessed with an intellect that at once was poetic as well as visionary. In 1967, at a time when few American archaeologists were contemplating archaeology in and of the city (with all due respect to the late Bert Salwen and a few others), he had this to say about the nature of cities and urban archaeology (Cotter 1967[V]:1):

Of all the jungles which have ever hidden the works of man, the most formidable is the concrete jungle. This peculiarly human blight upon the land . . . lives by devouring itself continually. There is never a moment when some part of it is not being battered by iron balls, shattered, bulldozed and carted away until leveled, only to be gouged deep into the earth beneath and a new growth encouraged to reach into the air. . . . New growth is doomed from birth to vanish before newer growth, which in turn gives way to the newest growth . . . [but] among the roots of this jungle of metals and masonry, between deep multiple cellars, interrupted constantly by subways, utility conduits, sewers, street foundations and sunken expressways, are interspersed remnants of the past. Here a stone bridge 30 feet beneath the surface still spans a fossil creek which was filled in two centuries ago, [and] there a well, dry since the Revolution and choked with the debris of the last days of the 18th century . . . [in] its neat, circular brick casing.

John's career spanned more than six decades, and his archaeological and anthropological interests were as broad as his career was long. His dedication to excellence inspired several generations of students and fellow professionals, and his many contributions to his chosen profession reflected his wide-ranging interests. Moreover, he was a modest, generous, and compassionate man who always enjoyed sharing his vision of the world with others, and always with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye. He was also a consummate gentleman and a gentle and genteel man, an ardent optimist who viewed each day as another opportunity to learn and a master at challenging others never to cease learning. As testimony to his passion for learning, John's voluminous compilation of notes taken at lectures, conferences, and field trips throughout his life has become the stuff of legend among those who knew him well. In his own words, "I've always been a witness rather than a creator. . . . I have always been fascinated with observing, first, how people in prehistory and history . . . lived their various lifeways, and second, how anthropologists and archaeologists have responded to . . . interpretative challenge" (Roberts 1999:40).

John's love of poetry, and in particular the poetry of T. S. Eliot, was never far from his thoughts as he wrote about archaeological topics. He concluded his 1967 unpublished manuscript with the following passage (Cotter 1967[XVI]:5):

The scientist can explain it all, but he too often writes a labored language. The poet must be as perceptive and as precise as the scientist, only he must express himself with supreme clarity and communicate universally. The final word for the archaeologist has been said with beauty by T. S. Eliot in his Four Quartets:

"We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."

There can be no more fitting epitaph for the richly textured life and career of John L. Cotter than this, his favorite stanza by his favorite poet.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of several people in helping me compile information on the life and career of John L. Cotter. First, to Virginia Tomlin Cotter, Laurence Cotter, and Jean Spaans, my heartfelt gratitude for taking the time to review and correct errors in the manuscript at a time when they were still grieving their loss. To Helen Schenck, my thanks for tracking down the photograph of John from the University of Pennsylvania Museum archives. The photograph is used through the courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, H. Fred Schoch, photographer. Allen Cooper made available to me a listing of John's unpublished reports from his National Park Service career, and the accompanying bibliography could not have been completed without this huge assist from Allen. David Orr kindly provided me with information on the Park Service's newly established award in John's name, and made several suggestions to improve the accuracy of the manuscript. Likewise, Anthony Boldurian reviewed and made corrections to the manuscript and, although we had never met until after John's death, our shared reminiscences of a close friend and colleague provided us both with strength and comfort over the ensuing months. Rebecca Yamin also reviewed the manuscript and made several suggestions for its improvement. Margy Schoettle expertly assisted me with word processing and editing chores, a not so insignificant task considering the sheer number of bibliographic entries that encompass John's career. Finally, I am grateful that I had the opportunity to know and work closely with John for more than a decade. He was an unparalleled source of personal and professional inspiration for me, and I will forever remember his unfailing courtesy, generosity, sense of humor, and wise counsel.

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