Memorial



Figure 1. Norman Barka on boat, Guana Island, British Virgin Islands 1999. (Photo by Mark Kostro.)

Norman F. Barka 1938–2008

On 29 April 2008, Norman F. (Forthun) Barka, a stalwart in the field of historical archaeology, died at the age of 70. At the time of his passing, he was professor emeritus in the Department of Anthropology at the College of William and Mary. He had taught there for 39 years, retiring in 2004. Barka is survived by his wife of 28 years, Patricia Kandle; his three sons, Eric T. Barka, Daniel J. Barka, and David N. Barka; two grandchildren; and Anne G. McBride of Washington State, wife by a previous marriage.

Norman Barka, known as Norm to his friends and Stormin' Norman to many of his students, first evinced an interest in archaeology as a young man growing up in Chicago. His parents, Scandinavian immigrants, encouraged the archaeological interests of their precocious son. Norm aspired to be the next Howard Carter and was drawn to movies with archaeological themes, such as Boris Karloff's *The Mummy*. Even before he had graduated from high school he was working as a research assistant for the Smithsonian Institution. His first paying job in archaeology was digging a Mandan site along the Missouri River (Robertson 2008). When he was only 20 years old, he participated in the Smithsonian Institution's excavation of the Russell Cave in Alabama.

Norm attended Beloit College in Wisconsin for his undergraduate degree, graduating in 1960 with a Bachelor of Art in Anthropology. During his formative years, he worked on sites in Mexico, Georgia, Washington State, Wisconsin, New York, and Canada. These experiences would serve him well later in life as he trained dozens of graduate and undergraduate students with diverse interests.

Barka's graduate work was completed at Harvard University where he took courses under the noted Paleolithic archaeologist Hallam Movius. His talents were unmistakable, and Movius held on

to some of his work, including a paper titled "The Significant Traits of the Main Developmental Stages of Pre-Urban Culture in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and at Jericho" (Barka 1961). It was during this period (1961–1964) that Barka's interest in the then nascent field of historical archaeology developed. It may have started when he began working on early French sites in Canada. He was exceptionally productive during this period. In 1964, he published a bibliography on historic sites in archaeology, titled *Some Sources for Use in the Interpretation of Historic Sites*. The following year he completed his dissertation on the historical archaeology of Portland Point in New Brunswick, Canada, from 1631 to 1850 (Barka 1965).

In 1965, Barka began his teaching career at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. He and his friend and colleague Nathan Altschuler were largely responsible for the founding of the Department of Anthropology, a program that has gone on to become one of the best-known training grounds for historical archaeologists in the United States.

In 1979, the College of William and Mary began offering the Master of Arts in Anthropology with a concentration in historical archaeology. Barka served as graduate director for more than 20 years, shepherding dozens of students through the program and training them in excavation and artifact analysis. He also participated in the creation of William and Mary's doctoral program and saw it welcome its first crop of graduate students before he moved into retirement (Brown 2005).

After a diverse array of early field experiences, Barka focused his interests on the archaeology of French colonial sites. At William and Mary, he established himself as an expert in comparative colonialism, doing work in the Chesapeake, Netherlands Antilles, especially St. Eustatius, and later on in Bermuda and Guana in the British Virgin Islands. In all of these areas, he made significant contributions, both by training students and through thoughtful publications.

In 1966, he discovered the Poor Potter's site. Thanks to his fine work, it is one of the most meticulously excavated colonial potteries in North America (Figure 2). The site's name does not



Figure 2. Norman Barka crouched next to a kiln at the Poor Potter Site in Yorktown, Virginia. (Photo courtesy of College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.)

reflect any lack of skill on the part of the potter, rather it is drawn from a letter by Virginia's Governor William Gooch who sent reports to England's Board of Trade about American manufactures and in 1732 noted the presence of a poor potter in the colony (Barka 2004:15). The statement was obviously made to confound the Board of Trade as Barka's excavations revealed two well-preserved kilns and the scattered and broken wares of a very talented potter on property once owned by William Rogers. That Barka's excavation of the site is still relevant today, 35 years after his initial excavation, speaks volumes for his meticulous craftsmanship. He and his students dug there until 1981 (Barka 2004:23).

In 1971, Barka, following up on the work of avocational archaeologist Leverette Gregory, identified the site now known as Flowerdew Hundred in Prince George's County, Virginia (*Time Magazine* 1972). He and his colleagues from William and Mary, particularly Charles Hodges and Andrew Edwards, would work there until 1978, although excavations continued after that under the direction of James Deetz and others (Deetz 1995:xi). One of the first English plantations in the New World, Flowerdew consists of a series of archaeological sites located on the grounds of a working farm owned by investment banker David A. Harrison III. Excavating there, Barka found armor and other traces of early settlement, including the remains of a cruck house, a form of earthfast dwelling. His work there foreshadowed later work by Ivor Noël Hume at Martin's Hundred and William Kelso at Jamestown. When Flowerdew Hundred was discovered, it was the only known enclosed settlement associated with the settlement period in colonial Virginia.

One of Barka's well-known publications, the article "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," co-authored with Cary Carson, William M. Kelso, Garry Wheeler Stone, and Dell Upton, built on the knowledge of earthfast structures he gained at places like Flowerdew (Carson et al. 1981).

Later, Barka expanded his research interests to include the colonial Caribbean. In 1981, he began digging in the Netherlands Antilles on the small but historically important island of St. Eustatius (Figure 3). Known colloquially as the Golden Rock for the wealth that accrued to the island's merchants through trade, St. Eustatius or Statia gained fame on 16 November 1776 when Governor Johannes de Graaff returned the salute of the American brig-of-war *Andrew Doria*. Archaeologically the site is one of the richest in the Americas, and although geographically small, it contains such an assortment of ruins and archaeological features reflecting its 18th-century prosperity that it has been dubbed a New World Pompeii (Dethlefsen et al. 1982).

Statia provided an ideal field laboratory for Barka. Over a nearly two-decade period, he regularly returned there with students in tow, excavating forts and warehouses, even discovering one of the first synagogues in the New World.

After Statia, Barka continued to explore his interest in comparative colonialism. In 1993, he began collaborating with his friend Edward Harris in the study of Bermuda's first forts. Among his most significant discoveries were the two towers of the diminutive Smith Fort, dating from 1613 (Harris 2002:12). During this period, he also dug the Captain's House at King's Castle, Bermuda. This is arguably the oldest standing English house in the Americas. Later still, Barka did survey work on St. Martin and Guana in the British Virgin Islands.

In addition to his teaching, scholarship, and fieldwork, Barka was a dedicated supporter of The Society for Historical Archaeology. After years of regularly attending meetings, he became an officer in the society. In 1979 he joined the Board of Directors as president-elect, serving the next year as president. In 1984, he organized a highly successful conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, setting a new attendance record for the society. His greatest accomplishment, however, may have been serving as *SHA Newsletter* editor for the society for 20 years from 1982 until 2002. During this time, he edited 81 newsletters! His record of editorial fortitude is unlikely to be matched. Under his oversight, the *Newsletter* matured from a mimeographed reporting of recent events to a much more substantial regular publication. For his hard work, he was rewarded with the SHA's Carol V. Ruppé Distinguished Service Award in 2001.

Speaking about his career in archaeology at the SHA's 2000 conference in Quebec City, Norm stated simply, "It's what I always wanted to be. In the end, historical archaeology is fun, an



Figure 3. Norman Barka in the sugar factory on Guana Island, British Virgin Islands, 2003. (Photo by Chuck Meide.)

enjoyable way of life. I have been very fortunate in feeling that my job is not really a job. It is just something I do and think about for 24 hours a day" (Brown 2005). With the passing of Norman Barka, historical archaeology has lost a meticulous researcher, gifted scholar, and a talented teacher and mentor. Perhaps most importantly we have lost someone who made historical archaeology fun.

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