



J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology: Martha A. Zierden

J. W. Joseph • Julia A. King

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Martha Anne Zierden (Fig. 1) is the recipient of the 2022 Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology. The award was presented at the SHA's annual conference, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in recognition of Martha's work in urban archaeology, public archaeology, collections management, and community archaeology focused on her long tenure in one of this nation's most historic cities, Charleston, South Carolina.

Childhood and Education

Martha was born in Rome, New York, on 5 August 1956, the oldest of four children. Her father was in the U.S. Air Force, and Martha was born while he was stationed at Griffis Air Force Base (AFB). Her childhood would take her to Maxwell Field AFB in Alabama, Clark AFB in the Philippines, and Myrtle Beach AFB in South Carolina before her father retired in 1966 and the family settled in Panama City, Florida, her mother's home. Martha's mother, Anne Holbrook Zierden, taught Spanish at Bay County High School and encouraged Martha's love of other cultures and the past; Martha had



Fig. 1 Martha A. Zierden, recipient of the 2022 J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology. (Photo by Sean Money, 2022; courtesy of the Charleston Museum.)

visited Charleston and its many historic homes and museums several times while her family was stationed at Myrtle Beach AFB. However, at that time she dreamed of becoming a marine biologist and had not “met” archaeology.

Upon graduating from Bay High School, Martha enrolled at Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City. Her plans to pursue a degree in marine biology were quickly derailed when Martha took

J. W. Joseph (✉)
New South Associates, 6150 East Ponce De Leon Avenue, Stone Mountain, GA 30083-2253, U.S.A.
e-mail: jwjoseph@newsouthassoc.com

J. A. King
Department of Anthropology, St. Mary's College of Maryland,
47645 College Drive, Saint Mary's City, MD 20686-3001, U.S.A.

chemistry courses and determined that she and chemistry were not a match. Having also taken an introductory anthropology course, Martha transferred to Florida State University (FSU) as an anthropology major. She came home the summer of 1977 and saw notices for a summer archaeological field school being taught by a recent addition to the faculty of the University of West Florida—Dr. Judith Bense. Martha took the field school and became hooked on archaeology. She then went to St. Augustine for Dr. Kathleen Deagan's field school and became hooked on historical archaeology. At FSU Martha also studied and conducted fieldwork with Dr. James Stoutamire, Dr. Anthony Paredes, Dr. Robert Dailey, and field supervisor Charles Poe, but was drawn to Kathy Deagan and her work in St. Augustine. Upon earning her bachelor's, she enrolled in FSU's graduate program as one of Deagan's graduate students. Responding to the challenges and complexity of urban archaeology, Martha developed a thesis comparing British and Spanish ceramics and lifeways and earned an M.A. in anthropology from FSU in 1981.

Following receipt of her M.A., Martha ran projects in the Southeast on a contract basis for a number of agencies, including in the National Park Service. In 1981 she was hired by fellow FSU graduate Patricia Logan Harrison to conduct a study of historical sites in the Francis Marion National Forest of South Carolina. Working at the forest provided Martha with proximity to Charleston, one of two cities (the other being New Orleans) where she hoped to be able to find a position doing urban archaeology. In 1981 she was hired by the Charleston Museum, and hope became reality.

The Charleston Museum

The Charleston Museum is one of the United States' oldest museums, established in 1773 and modeled on the British Museum, with the objective of collecting and interpreting the natural and cultural legacy of South Carolina's Lowcountry. Martha was hired by Dr. Elaine Herold, who had joined the museum in 1973 as the wife of then-director Donald Herold. Dr. Herold had conducted excavations at the Charleston Museum's Heyward Washington historic house and other historic sites, recognizing the archaeological potential of the city while also realizing her background left her ill-equipped to interpret that potential. She thus applied for a South Carolina Department of Archives and

History grant to develop an archaeological research design for Charleston. With the grant awarded, Elaine Herold hired Martha to direct the two-year project and present the results.

Working with historian Jeanne Calhoun, Martha developed a four-volume research design and preservation plan for the city, with the final volume summarizing the history of Charleston and various research themes that could be applied to its archaeological past. This work was cutting edge, coming at a time when urban archaeology was not widely practiced and relatively unknown in the South. As the project ended, Elaine Herold would leave the museum to follow her husband to his new position at the Museum of Buffalo, and Martha would be hired as the museum's new archaeologist.

Martha was hired as a contract employee and found contracts to support her employment through the City of Charleston. Charleston mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., first elected in 1975 and who would ultimately serve for five terms, led the economic recovery and revitalization of the city, at that time suffering from a stagnant economy, with empty storefronts and decaying architecture. Riley saw Charleston's potential to serve as a heritage-tourism destination and promoted historic preservation with an ordinance. He sought federal grant funding to support this revitalization, which, in turn, required assessments of the archaeological resources affected by these projects in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. The construction of the Charleston Place Hotel and shops in the historic district provided the anchor complex that Riley needed to attract both meetings and tourists to Charleston, and archaeology was conducted by Dr. Nicholas Honerkamp as well as Martha. On her own, Martha directed National Historic Preservation Act compliance excavations at McCrady's Longroom, Lodge Alley, First Trident, and other projects in support of the city and developers working with federal grants.

Martha was one of a handful of archaeologists working on urban sites along the Atlantic seaboard in the early 1980s. Notably, these included Nan Rothschild, Joan Geismar, and Diana Wall in New York; Mary Beaudry in Boston; and Pam Cressey in Alexandria. Martha participated in the SHA's urban archaeology working group meetings, held the day before the annual meeting, and began to present and publish on urban archaeology. The urban archaeology working group was composed of cultural resource management archaeologists as well as Martha and her colleagues who held city, museum, or university posts, and helped promote

the “city as site” approach championed by Cressey, while refining methods and analytical models.

Working with Kathy Deagan in St. Augustine, Martha had learned the importance of zooarchaeology in the interpretation of historical sites. She also met Elizabeth (Betsy) Reitz, who was then a doctoral student of Dr. Elizabeth Wing at the University of Florida. Martha engaged Betsy, who by then had earned her Ph.D. and accepted a position at the University of Georgia, to analyze the fauna from the Charleston projects she was directing, although Betsy noted that most of the early collections were too small for meaningful analysis. In 1984 the two would collaborate on a grant-funded project to investigate the beef market shown on early maps of Charleston. Their limited unit excavations revealed 10 times the density of faunal material per unit than Martha had seen on any other project in the city, but grant applications for further work were denied by the grant-committee historians, who questioned whether the market was indeed in this location. Martha and Betsy would return to the site in 2004 during renovations of Charleston City Hall, which occupied a portion of the site, and excavations beneath the floors of city hall proved the existence of the market on this site. Working with Betsy, the analysis of foodways and the information they revealed on the social and cultural systems of Charleston would become one of the hallmarks of Martha’s work and collaborations.

While Martha’s research focused on Charleston, her work extended beyond the city’s limits to explore important rural sites. Beginning in 1997, Martha conducted several seasons of work at Willtown, which was founded in 1694 as the second city in the South Carolina colony, but abandoned. Martha’s work at Willtown included archaeological field schools for students from the College of Charleston taught by Martha and her colleague Ron Anthony. Ron and Martha would also work and direct field schools at plantations on the Charleston Museum’s Dill Sanctuary, and she would incorporate students into field schools on urban sites. While Martha had defined the rural vs. urban contrast as a research topic in her 1984 preservation plan and research design, she quickly recognized the importance of urban–rural connections, as Lowcountry planters brought their wealth and charges to estates they created in Charleston.

Now, with a permanent, rather than contract, position at the Charleston Museum, Martha’s excavations shifted to the historic homes and yards of the Charleston

Museum, the Historic Charleston Foundation (HCF), the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and private owners. Martha began to incorporate the artifacts from these and other excavations into the museum’s exhibits in multiple displays. Her work in collections and interpretation saw her serve in 1991 as chief curator for a special exhibit, “Links in a Chain: The Significance of African-American Labor,” at the Charleston Museum and reached florescence in 1989 and again in 2004 when she curated her own exhibit, “The Bountiful Coast, Foodways of the South Carolina Lowcountry,” that employed archaeological remains.

Martha made archaeology a presence in Charleston, working with city officials, including Mayor Riley; Steve Livingston, the director of parks; and Kin Hill of Charleston Water Systems, creating such a presence that many regard her as the city archaeologist, although such a formal title does not exist. Martha also partnered with the city’s preservation associations, most notably the HCF. Carter H. Hudgins and Jon Poston at the HCF were influential in promoting historical archaeology in the city, and Martha worked with them as well as architects who the HCF advised on restorations, including Glenn Keyes and Richard “Moby” Marks. Her most productive relationship with HCF personnel was her collaboration with Katherine Saunders Pemberton on research and survey for elements of the walled city that defined Charleston’s colonial landscape and that would see architectural elements in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. Martha and Katherine would both be appointed members of the City of Charleston’s Walled City Task Force, and their efforts have succeeded in identifying and interpreting components of the Walled City, particularly in city-sponsored excavations of the redan at South Adger’s Wharf. Throughout her years and efforts, Martha has made an indelible mark on Charleston and has made archaeology part of the historic landscape of Charleston that visitor’s enjoy.

Career Impacts

In her nomination statement, Katherine Pemberton noted that Martha’s impacts on the field are felt in the areas of urban archaeology scholarship, in collaboration, and as an advocate and mentor.

Martha Zierden actively and vigorously promoted the importance of archaeology in urban settings, challenging the once common notion that city construction

left no archaeological legacy intact. While Martha spoke regularly at archaeological conferences, she did not limit her oratorical skills to the choir, speaking to a broad range of other associations, including the Southeastern Museums Conference, the Southern Anthropological Association, the American Association for State and Local History, the Winterthur Conference on Material Culture, the American Ceramics Circle, the Southern Garden History Society, the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture, the Carolina Gold Rice Symposium, the Charleston Art and Antiques Forum, US/ICOMOS, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. She also published extensively, with her first publication appearing in the 1984 issue of *South Carolina Antiquities*, in a joint volume she coedited with Nicholas Honerkamp and to which she contributed three of the five articles (Zierden 1984; Zierden and Calhoun 1984; Zierden and Trinkley 1984). Her first of many articles in *Historical Archaeology* would appear in 1986 (Zierden and Calhoun 1986), and in 1999 she served as guest editor and article author for a thematic issue of the journal entitled *Charleston in the Context of Trans-Atlantic Culture* (Zierden 1999). She would contribute, as an editor and author, to a number of edited books, including *Carolina's Historical Landscapes* (Zierden 1997), *Another's Country: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on Cultural Interactions in the Southern Colonies* (Zierden 2002), *Unlocking the Past: Celebrating Historical Archaeology in North America* (Zierden 2005), and *Material Culture in Anglo-America: Regional Identity and Urbanity in the Tidewater, Lowcountry, and Caribbean* (Zierden 2009). In 2016 Martha and Betsy Reitz published *Charleston: An Archaeology of Life in a Coastal Community* (Zierden and Reitz 2016), recipient of the SHA's 2018 James Deetz Book Award. Nan Rothschild described the book as

a wonderful example of historical archaeology at its best, combining the minutiae of daily life with a broad historical gaze. But the book would not have been possible without decades of projects, small and large, set within and around that city. I am truly astonished at the quantity of diversity of those projects. (Pemberton 2019)

As a collaborator, Martha thoroughly documented all of her many excavations, made her results available, and communicated and consulted with a variety of archaeologists working in the city. She authored or coauthored

virtually all of the 51 “Archaeological Contribution Studies” published by the museum. While in print format, she worked to make these available at nominal cost to interested researchers; now in digital format, she and museum director Carl Borick have provided all of these reports as digitally accessible documents on the museum's Website, <<https://www.charlestonmuseum.org/research/archaeology-reports/>>.

Archaeologists who have worked in Charleston repeatedly comment on how open Martha is with her knowledge and expertise. Eric Poplin described interacting with Martha on several Charleston projects and noted: “I never failed to gain knowledge and insight from these collaborations and feel honored to have had the opportunities to work with Martha over the last 30 years in Charleston” (Pemberton 2019). Jon Marcoux stated: “Martha is also a key facilitator and collaborator in research projects of countless colleagues. ... It is clear that archaeology is her vocation, and she pursues it with a level of passion that ... is both inspiring and contagious” (Pemberton 2019). Martha's collaboration is also seen in her professional service, including as a member of the South Carolina National Register of Historic Places Review Board, as a member of the South Carolina Heritage Trust Advisory Board, as a member of the *South Carolina Historical Magazine's* editorial advisory board, and as chair of the intersociety relations committee and member of the board of directors of the Society for Historical Archaeology.

Martha's impact as an instructor and advocate is deep and long lasting. Corey Heyward stated: “I first met Martha while I was an undergraduate at the College of Charleston. There are many of us in the Southeast who were students and interns of Martha, and it is because of her passion and mentorship that we remained in the field of archaeology” (Pemberton 2019). Syracuse University doctoral candidate Sarah Platt notes of her dissertation research residency at the Charleston Museum Archaeology Laboratory:

Martha not only welcomes researchers into the truly world-class collections she has accumulated over her thirty-year tenure; she enthusiastically encourages others to play in her proverbial sand-box. She is exceedingly generous with her time, access to artifacts, and support to all who pass through the museum store-room. (Pemberton 2019)

Martha's work in urban archaeology, public archaeology, and collections management, and her collaboration and mentorship of colleagues and students have had a lasting impact on historical archaeology at large and the archaeology of Charleston in particular. For these contributions she was awarded the SHA's 2022 J. C. Harrington Medal.

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