



Memorial: Edward B. Jelks (1922–2021)

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Professor Edward Baker Jelks (Fig. 1), a founder the Society of Professional Archeologists and the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), was a self-proclaimed “dirt archaeologist,” whose research and teaching significantly advanced the understanding of the past and influenced multiple generations of students.

Ed Jelks was born in Macon, Georgia, in 1922. In 1939, he began premed training at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1941 and served until 1945. Ed married Juliet “Judy” Christian in 1944. For more than 50 years, Judy was an indispensable partner in much of his archaeological research. She died in 2017.

Ed received a B.A. in English in 1948 and began graduate work in anthropology at UT Austin in 1949. In 1950, after completing his M.A. coursework, he accepted a position at the Austin office of the Smithsonian Institution’s River Basin Surveys (RBS). This experience inspired him to develop a rigorous approach for identifying sites of uncertain location, combining archaeological and documentary data.

In 1951 Ed became the director of the RBS office in Austin. During the next two years, he and his staff surveyed several planned reservoirs and excavated numerous sites. Ed also worked at the Paleo-Indian sites of Blackwater Draw, Lubbock Lake, and Friesenhahn Cave.

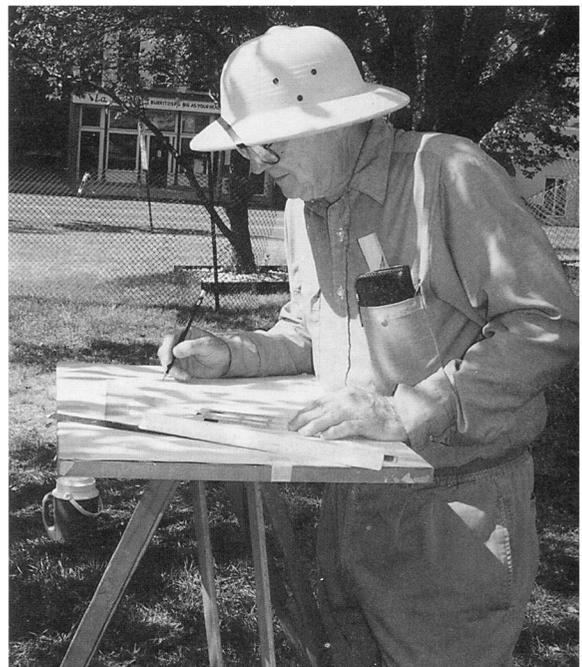


Fig. 1. Ed Jelks at the McClean County (Illinois) World War II memorial.

Concern with the organization of the immense amount of material recovered during these and other projects fostered development of *An Introductory Handbook of Texas Archeology*, which he edited with Dee Ann Suhm and Alex Krieger (Suhm et al. 1954, 2009). This monograph, which remains a standard reference, is a comprehensive typology of Texas prehistoric and historical Native American artifacts.

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In 1953, the RBS office in Austin closed, and Ed joined the National Park Service, where he served as John Cotter's assistant at Jamestown, Virginia. He also conducted exploratory excavations at Yorktown Battlefield, Virginia.

Ed returned to Austin in 1956 to reopen the RBS office. In 1958, however, the office was closed again, and Ed entered UT Austin's then-new doctoral program in anthropology. He also continued to work fulltime on contract archaeology projects as the organizer and director of the Texas Archeological Salvage Project, which resulted in more than 150 rescue-archaeology reports.

Ed was awarded a Ph.D. in 1965 and soon after was hired to teach at Southern Methodist University (SMU).

In 1967, Ed and Arnold Pilling organized a conference on historical archaeology that resulted in the formation of the SHA. Ed was awarded the SHA's highest honor, the J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology, in 1988.

Between 1965 and 1969, Ed conducted excavations and field studies at many historical sites in Texas, and, in the summers of 1965 and 1966, at Signal Hill National Historical Park, St. John's, Newfoundland.

Ed left SMU in 1968 and spent seven months as a Smithsonian Institution research fellow working on a typology of English, French, and Spanish colonial ceramics. Later that year he accepted a position as professor of anthropology at Illinois State University (ISU) in Normal, Illinois, a position he held until his retirement in 1984. While at ISU, the anthropology program dramatically expanded. Especially popular were his seminar in historical archaeology and the summer field schools that he and Judy organized.

In 1980 Ed established the Midwestern Archeological Research Center (MARC) at ISU in response to the expansion of contract archaeology in Illinois. MARC focused primarily on historical archaeological sites and standing structures.

In 1976, he chaired the Society for American Archaeology committee that recommended establishing the Society of Professional Archaeologists.

Ed's longstanding interest in artifact classification included work on European ceramics, French trade goods, and prehistoric lithics and ceramics.

A common theme running through many of Jelks's publications and lectures is the importance of rigorous methods for interpreting the significance of spatial positioning in the archaeological record. Relatedly, he developed a useful general methodology for analyzing and interpreting intrasite contexts and inferring past human behavior from contextual data.

On the evening of 22 December 2021, Professor Jelks passed peacefully, in his 99th year.

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