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MEMORIAL

Memorial: George Robert Fischer (1937–2016)

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Time and Tide Wait for No Man

At just after three bells of the first "dog watch" (5:45 PM) of 29 May 2016, a small 26 ft. sailboat named *Foolish Pleasure* left the Shell Point marina south of Tallahassee, Florida, and sailed over the horizon. At the helm was a slim man bearing a striking resemblance to Czar Nicholas II and King George V. He was wearing boat shoes without socks. A Greek fisherman's cap was perched on the back of his head. In his free hand was a brown plastic "go cup." George Fischer had slipped the cable that moored him to this world and embarked on his next great adventure (Fig. 1).

This is not a standard professional obituary. Those who knew George outside the bravado, the earnestness, and often "wise-guy hijinks" at dozens of SHA/ACUA conferences know that he was the product of a life interesting beyond those of most people. Over the past 37 years his story was told to me through hundreds of E-mails, Wikipedia entries, and a coauthored book. Thus, this is "his" publication.

Formative Years

George Robert Fischer was born in Susanville, a small town in rural Lassen County, California, on 4 May 1937. His family lived on a small government compound some distance out in the surrounding Lassen National Forest. In those days his father's employment with the U.S. Forest Service was as much a way of life as a job (Skowronek and Fischer 2009:33–35).

George's childhood and youth were anything but mundane. He and his older sister, Helene, were the precocious children of U.S. Forest Service ranger George A. Fischer and Ruth Isabel Robertson. They grew up with a great reverence for nature and an abiding respect for history. They lived near one of the points of entry for a branch of the Emigrant Trail and also the site of the Modoc Indian War. George's father managed a large ranger district and helped guard the Modoc National Forest from Japanese balloon-borne firebombs during World War II, as well as the far more mundane, but not necessarily less lethal, lightning-induced forest fires. Sometimes he would come across the detritus of abandoned supplies scattered along the old trail in the forest. One of those finds was a well-worn ox shoe that he gave to his son. George valued that artifact; decades later in the 1980s, relying on the skills that he picked up doing archaeology, he conserved it and returned it to his father as a sign of his respect for the past and the role his father had played in teaching his son about the importance of preservation.

People sometimes wonder how a native Californian, who grew up in the very rural high desert in the northeast corner of the state, ended up in Florida—the most distant point on the opposite side of the country—doing

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Fig. 1 George Fischer in his office in the Bellamy Building on the FSU campus, 1983. (Photo courtesy of Nancy and Matt Fischer.)

underwater archaeology. It is a complicated outcome that nobody could have predicted, even as it developed. In retrospect, however, it makes a certain amount of sense.

When George was four, his father was offered his own ranger district in the Modoc National Forest, a relative coup at that early stage of his career. This entailed a move to a yet smaller place, Tulelake, a very rural community immortalized by Zane Grey in the book *Forlorn River*. There George and his sister Helene lived for the next 16 years.

George's mother, Ruth Isabel Robertson, a native of Washington State, was a schoolteacher and quite dedicated to the education of young people. She saw to it that the children had a cultured upbringing. She would often read poetry or Shakespeare to the family on winter nights when the wind whistled and snow swirled outside. She was also a liberated self-actualizing woman, long before such behavior was considered fashionable. George often recalled that it was "Mom" who had pushed him toward academic successes in which he was not particularly interested.

One of the most important phases of George's youth and his mother's place in those formative years began when he was five years old. Seventy years later he wrote: "When I was five years old my mother sent me to a concentration camp." This was the opening line of a 16-page-long Christmas "gift" to his son, grandchildren, and friends titled: "The Tule Lake War Relocation Center, a Retrospective on a Misspent Youth" (Fischer 2012). During 1942 and 1943 George spent his days at the Tule Lake Japanese Relocation Center, the largest of

> ten War Relocation Authority camps established to detain people of Japanese descent, as mandated by Executive Order 9066, issued Feb. 19, 1942, after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The camp opened May 26, 1942, detaining Japanese people removed from western Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. At its peak, it contained 18,700 people. It was closed on March 28, 1946. (Fischer 2012)

George's mother, Ruth, and "a few other local women with teaching qualifications ... began to teach, as best they could, in the tar paper covered barracks buildings that comprised the camp." While she taught high-school chemistry, George attended the camp's elementary school. She figured that George might as well, at that tender age, learn about the unfair vagaries of life. For a year George played and schooled with the interred children. The Fischers left the camp shortly after the administration of an infamous "loyalty questionnaire," designed to determine where the political sentiments of the internees lay. School was suspended, and George's mother was one of those designated to administer the test. "She thought at the time it was a very, very bad

idea, and knew it was much misunderstood by many of the internees." This led to violence, and as a result

> martial law was imposed on November 14, 1943. The Army took control of the Tule Lake Segregation Center with 1,200 armed soldiers. The 28 guard towers were manned by armed soldiers, 8 tanks, and 6 patrol cars. The Army had 18 horses used by the guards to patrol the perimeter of the prison. (Fischer 2012)

With that the Fischers were required to leave the camp.

Two decades later, during the six years in the 1960s when he lived in the Washington, D.C., area, George was employed as an archaeologist in the headquarters office of the National Park Service and became involved in some civil-rights activities. In what seemed a natural outgrowth of his experience during the war, George contacted some Japanese people in the area and was invited to a meeting of the Japanese American Citizens League. It was then that he fully realized the stigma attached to the history of the camps, as the people he met there did not want to talk about them. In the years that have intervened, he often thought about these experiences. George ended his account powerfully:

> Even with the innocence of a five year old, I was aware something wasn't right with the whole situation. I used to feel very sorry that at the end of the day I could go home to my own house, my bed, my toys, and my cat, while my friends in the school had to stay there in those depressing tar paper covered barracks, in that very dusty place (or if it rained in that desert, a very muddy place), the Tule Lake "Jap Camp." Through it all, however, one thought will always remain quite clear in my mind—**THIS MUST NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN!** (Fischer 2012)

Anthropology is not a career per se, it is a way of living one's life and seeing the world from a multiplicity of perspectives. The experience at Tulelake was a defining moment in George's life that would put him on the path to becoming an anthropologist.

George attended Stanford University from 1955 to 1962 and, there, with his friend Land Lindbergh, son of the famed aviator Charles Lindbergh, took classes in anthropology. Along the way he signed on with the National Park Service for a summer survey of a portion of Mesa Verde. He continued as a summer seasonal ranger and archaeologist at Wupatki National Monument in Arizona. Those experiences and his work with Bert Gerow on shell-midden sites, which once were found in great profusion surrounding San Francisco Bay, led to him to earning his B.A. and then completing his coursework for the M.A. in anthropology at Stanford. As with so many of colleagues, the offer of a permanent position with the National Park Service in 1962 caused him to move from Palo Alto and derailed the completion of his thesis. While that reality often stung, it did not preclude George's fabulous career.

It was also at Stanford that George met his soulmate, Nancy. They wed on 20 June 1961 and spent the ensuing five-plus decades together. With the NPS position in hand, newlyweds Nancy and George Fischer left California and headed east (Skowronek and Fischer 2009:36–37).

Professional Career

National Park Service

When George applied for a permanent position with the National Park Service (NPS) in 1962, it was one of the more competitive federal agencies to join. There were only 32 archaeologists in the federal government then, and they were all with the NPS. After 18 months at Montezuma Castle National Monument in central Arizona, George was promoted and transferred to Ocmulgee National Monument in Macon, Georgia, as park archaeologist. While in Macon he taught anthropology courses at Mercer and Wesleyan universities.

From Ocmulgee he moved to a staff position with the NPS Division of Archeology in Washington, D.C. From 1966 to 1972 he worked in the Office of Chief Archeologist of the National Park Service, Dr. John Corbett. It was Corbett who, in 1967, assigned George the task of conducting a study of both the needs and potential for underwater archaeology in the NPS. Within a year George was diving off Islamorada, Florida, with Mendel Peterson, curator of maritime history at the Smithsonian Institution Museum of History and Technology, on the 1733 Spanish vessel *San José de las Anímas*. It was during this project that he met treasure hunters Tom Gurr and Mel Fisher for the first time.

Returning from that project he and Marian Riggs published *Prospectus for Underwater Archeology* (Fischer and Riggs 1968). Chief Corbett read it and liked it and decided to implement it, so Fischer suddenly became the underwater archaeologist for the National Park Service.

Underwater Archaeology

Beginning in 1968 with a project at Montezuma Well, Montezuma Castle National Monument, Arizona, and continuing for the next 20 years until his retirement in 1988, Fischer pioneered underwater archaeology in the National Park Service. This included projects in California at San Miguel Island, Channel Islands National Park; in Florida at Biscayne National Monument (later National Park), Fort Jefferson National Monument (now Dry Tortugas National Park), and Santa Rosa Island and Perdido Key, Gulf Islands National Seashore; in North Carolina at Moore's Creek National Battlefield; in Texas at Padre Island National Seashore with J. Barto Arnold (past president of the Society for Historical Archaeology [SHA]) and Carl Clausen (Fig. 2); and in the U.S. Virgin Islands at Virgin Islands National Park, St. John, and Buck Island Reef National Monument, St. Croix.

Tallahassee 1972–1988

In 1972, in the midst of these projects, Fischer, then aged 35, left the Division of Archeology in Washington, D.C., and moved to the Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC) on the campus of Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, Florida. The symbiotic relationship between the SEAC and the FSU Department of Anthropology meant that Fischer had students, both undergraduate and graduate, working on these projects. Many of these students went on to play important roles in government-sponsored archaeology, including Daniel Lenihan, retired head of the National Park Service's Submerged Resources Center (formerly Submerged Cultural Resources Unit) in Santa Fe; Christopher Hamilton, today an archaeologist with the U.S. Army at Fort Benning; and David Brewer, senior territorial archaeologist for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Those who knew Fischer during this period of his career will remember it as a heady time for underwater archaeology in Florida. While treasure hunters like Mel Fisher continued to salvage historical shipwrecks, the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research was actively engaged in underwater projects at Warm Mineral Springs under the direction of Wilburn "Sonny" Cockrell, who had replaced Carl Clausen as the Florida State Underwater Archaeologist, and James Dunbar, who was working on drowned Pleistocene sites along the Gulf Coast. Later, Roger Smith would don the mantle of Florida State Underwater Archaeologist, turning to shipwrecks in addition to prehistoric sites.

In those days George was ensconced in a small 10 × 10 ft. office adjacent to SEAC's collection storage area in the Bellamy Building on the FSU campus (Fig. 1). At that time SEAC's main office was located in a different

Fig. 2 George Fischer during the Padre Island survey, 1970. (Photo courtesy of Nancy and Matt Fischer.)

building, Montgomery Gymnasium, a short five-minute walk up the "hill." In this small paneled space were several floor-to-ceiling bookcases. This was a different time, as, perched on one of the shelves, was a human skull that had been discovered by his father decades earlier. The walls were decorated with a heavily beaded beaver skin and a number of certificates and awards. The office was further outfitted with gray "government issue" Steelcase-brand filing cabinets, a credenza, and a typing table with typewriter. It was not uncommon to see George hunched over that machine typing out letters and memos on yellow 6 × 4 in. sheets from "Optional Form 41, Routing and Transmittal Slips" notepads. At this "command post," George sat in his large brown-leather chair (Skowronek and Fischer 2009:45, figure 3.3). In front of him was a gray steel paper-strewn desk that dominated the small office space. On it was his name plate with the National Park Service arrowhead logo. Next to that, in the era of Ronald Reagan, was a jar of jellybeans. Dominating it all was a large amber-colored glass ashtray filled to the rim with patted-flat fine gray ash and with a sign that read: "Feel Free to Smoke." This was the era when cigarette and pipe smoke often filled the offices and hallways of the university. Somehow in this small space he had two double-armed desk chairs for visitors. I well remember meeting George's friend from this period, Dr. Hannah Marie Wormington, the author of *Ancient Man in North America* (1939) and *Prehistoric Indians of the Southwest* (1947) (Wormington 1944, 1947). She and George were "puffing away" and recalling an earlier period in their careers. Edwin S. "Ted" Dethlefsen, coauthor with James Deetz of the 1967 *Natural History* article titled: "Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow" (Deetz and Dethlefsen 1967), also visited George following his work on the *Whydah*.

It should also be noted that Fischer also worked on non-NPS projects. From July to September 1969 he served as field coordinator on the excavation of the 19th-century steamboat *Bertrand* on the Desoto Nationa1 Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Valley, Iowa, and 20 years later he would conduct an underwater archaeological survey of Wakulla Springs in Florida.

George was accompanied on many of these projects by his wife Nancy and son Matt. Both played important roles as crewmembers and for their perspectives as outsiders to the day-to-day operations.

Bertrand

On 1 April 1865, in the closing weeks of the Civil War, the steamboat *Bertrand,* bound for the Montana Territory on the upper reaches of the Missouri River, hit a snag and sank between Iowa and Nebraska. Just over a century later, in 1968, the wreck was found by private salvagers in the De Soto National Wildlife Refuge, a property administered by the Department of the Interior. As the site lay on federal lands, the Antiquities Act of 1906 was used as the basis for stopping the salvage of the site. In 1969, Fischer, the sole underwater archaeologist in the National Park Service, served as field coordinator on the excavation of the vessel that, ironically, was buried when the river's course changed. Over 500,000 items were excavated from the wreck: whole objects in incredible condition, still packed in the original crates with the names of the manufacturers, shippers, and consignees. This opened his eyes to the "time capsule" nature of historical shipwreck sites, allowing one to see a specific day and event caught in time.

Fort Jefferson

Fischer's defining work during his first decade at FSU was his discovery of the wreck of *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* (1622) in the Dry Tortugas near Fort Jefferson. Fischer had conducted research in the park in 1970, 1971, and 1974. At the same time George was working at Fort Jefferson, two vessels of the Spanish 1622 fleet, *Atocha* and *Margarita*, were found by Mel Fisher and Treasure Salvors, Inc., outside the park in the nearby Marquesa Islands. Both of these teams staged their work out of Key West. As might be imagined, Fisher and Treasure Salvors, Inc., were often seen as the local heroes. This was the era when admiralty law was still being applied to shipwrecks. Mel Fisher's team had won court cases and would look for ways to press into federally protected submerged lands. Those traveling to Fort Jefferson would ride the NPS supply boat and would pass within hailing distance of operations of Treasure Salvors.

In 1981, through his connections as an instructor for the FSU Academic Diving Program, George gained access to the research vessel *Bellows*. Gregg Stanton and Les Parker of the FSU Academic Diving Program worked with George and students in the class ANT 3133 on conducting small field projects, often in conjunction with NPS cultural resource projects. One project was

conducted at what was then Fort Jefferson National Monument (today Dry Tortugas National Park) in the fall of 1981 and the summer of 1982. The documentary record indicated that *Nuestra Señora del Rosario* had gone aground in the Dry Tortugas and was later salvaged. That salvaged vessel, rumored to be a *patache*, was subsequently lost on the islands when another storm blew through in that same ill-fated year. This project found irrefutable evidence in the forms of the artifacts and ship fittings that this was a site associated with the Spanish 1622 treasure fleet. It also led to a confrontation with treasure hunters.

During the summer of 1982, Fischer's crew was brought to the deck of the research vessel by gunfire. Radio transmissions from the boat to command posts on Loggerhead Key and in Fort Jefferson were being monitored by individuals who were interested in "finding treasure." Those individuals hoped George and his colleagues would be scared off the site and, thus, would give them a chance to check it out. An armed NPS ranger was dispatched to confront one of the individuals, who informed the ranger that he was simply "shooting at sharks," and it was only happenstance that the bullets were ripping over the heads of the two-person dive team; one happened to be a Vietnam vet and the other was an active member of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The shooter was "asked" to leave the park.

Biscayne—HMS *Fowey*

In 1968, Biscayne National Monument was placed under the NPS's stewardship. Its clear waters contain the northernmost coral reefs in the Atlantic Ocean and the remains of many shipwrecks, including the two northernmost wrecks from the Spanish 1733 plate fleet—*Nuestra Señora del Pópulo* and *El Consulado*. As a property under the stewardship of the National Park Service, Biscayne National Monument's cultural and natural resources had to be inventoried and evaluated in order to make informed management decisions. Park personnel might begin to collect basic resource information, but it generally fell to the NPS's specialists to compile more exhaustive and authoritative data to produce a comprehensive management plan. For Biscayne, that specialist in cultural resources was George Fischer.

In 1970 Fischer was part of an advance-planning team sent to the area before it had yet been transferred from the State of Florida to the NPS. At that time he began compiling information on known and potential shipwreck sites in the park. Among these data were recurring rumors of the existence of a probable 18th-century vessel in an area called Legare Anchorage. In August and September of 1975 Fischer directed underwater archaeological surveys of Biscayne National Monument and located 40 sites (Fischer 1975).

In the fall of 1979 Fischer received a call from Curtiss Peterson, then the conservation laboratory director, and Wilburn "Sonny" Cockrell, Florida State Underwater Archaeologist. They had just come from a meeting in Judge's Chambers of the U.S. District Court, Southern District of Florida, in Miami. David Paul Horan, a prominent attorney for treasure-salvage interests, had been informing the court (and them) of a series of alleged shipwrecks for which he and his clients were filing suit for salvage rights. One was in Legare Anchorage in Biscayne National Monument. Long anticipated, NPS's involvement in a treasure shipwreck case had begun.

Through legal conflicts and systematic surveys and archaeological investigations in 1980 and 1983, Fischer and his staff from the NPS and students from Florida State University not only identified the sunken vessel as HMS *Fowey*, an English warship lost in 1748, but also won a legal battle that effectively changed how admiralty law was applied to submerged shipwreck sites. The court found that the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was just as applicable to submerged shipwreck sites as it was to historical sites on land, no longer allowing plundering by individuals using marine salvage and admiralty law to profiteer from the non-archaeological salvage of an historical shipwreck on national-park grounds.

When the project started in 1979 there were no federal laws specifically protecting shipwrecks, and the concept of "sovereign immunity" rights of warships had never been applied to "historic" vessels lost before 1939. With the victory in this case, which now stands as a landmark in historical shipwreck litigation and preservation, and the later passage of both the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and the Abandoned Shipwreck Act, under the law "historic" wrecks gained protection from illicit salvage, *and*, at the same time, the door seemed to open for research on practically any vessel (Skowronek and Fischer 2009:154–164). Thus, the father of underwater archaeology in the National Park Service, whose career had started in the Florida Keys dealing with treasure hunters, ended his NPS career beating them in court.

Leaving the National Park Service

Early in his underwater career George had injured his spine in a diving-related accident. As a result, he suffered chronic pain that medication did not relieve. Medical issues were only part of the reason for his retirement, the other was the loss of his beloved underwater program in the NPS Southeast Region. In 1984 it was decided that all underwater programs would henceforth be handled through the Submerged Cultural Resources Unit then based in Santa Fe. It is now referred to as the Submerged Resources Center and is in Lakewood, Colorado. This change was a mystifying development, for this news came following successful projects in Fort Jefferson National Monument and Biscayne, whose status had changed from a national monument to park in 1980. George's retirement came in 1988 at the young age of 51, 30 years after he first joined the service. Nearly 20 years later, in 2007, Cameron Binkley, the NPS Southeast Regional Historian published *Science Politics and the 'Big Dig': A History of the Southeast Archeological Center and Development of Cultural Resource Management in the Southeast* (Binkley 2007), a very thorough and interesting study that traces SEAC's history back to the projects of the early 1930s. Binkley observed that the center chief was not a strong supporter of NPS underwater archaeology, and that the "non-negotiable" closing of the underwater program had far-reaching impacts. Binkley also noted that the center played a seminal role in launching a federal underwater archaeology program, and the mishandling of this promising initial effort was to the detriment of both effective underwater cultural resources management in the Southeast Region and NPS-FSU relations. This confirmed what George had always suspected, that the program was purposely suppressed. It also gave him the incentive to write his 2009 book, *HMS* Fowey *Lost ... and Found!* (Skowronek and Fischer 2009).

Teaching

In addition to his NPS career, Fischer served in the Department of Anthropology at Florida State University for more than a quarter of a century (1974–2001). There the "courtesy assistant professor" was paid the princely sum of $1.00 per year. Annually, during the fall quarter (in 1980 FSU changed to semesters), he taught "Introduction to Underwater Archaeology" to both undergraduate and graduate students, who ultimately numbered more than a thousand. George gave lively "magic-lantern show" slide-illustrated lectures. These were often peppered with personal remarks about other practicing underwater archaeologists. In his early years at FSU, the field was in its nascent stage, and its few practitioners knew and often worked with each other. This was also long before the passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act, when admiralty law and treasure hunting was the norm. No doubt in a moment of pique George was heard to utter, during a discussion of some of Florida's treasure hunters, that he "should've killed them when he had the chance." Hyperbole it was, but in the 1970s and 1980s submerged resources were seen as "different" by the public and the archaeological community. This has largely changed since the passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act in 1987. Suffice it to say that George stood by his ethical stance repeatedly in depositions to the Security and Exchange Commission in cases against Seahawk Deep Ocean Technology, Inc., and others.

George also used his course as a way of identifying students with the potential for further classes, work with the NPS, or future research leadership roles. Fischer understood the adage that it was easier to teach an archaeologist to dive than to teach a diver to be an archaeologist. For example, in the fall of 1979 Richard Johnson, then a graduate student seeking a master of arts in interdisciplinary studies combining anthropology, geography, and history, was tasked with analyzing artifacts from the Legare Anchorage wreck in Biscayne National Park. That same year George exploited my (Russell Skowronek's) background in international law of the sea and had me work with lawyers for the State of Florida regarding any possible legislation that might protect that site. Others, including future SHA president Charles Ewen and NPS curator Richard H. Vernon, were identified for participation in underwater projects.

Fischer spent the spring term assisting in or co-instructing courses in scientific diving techniques and project management through the FSU Academic Diving Program. The FSU Marine Lab and Academic Diving Program supported the research diving needs of faculty and students from many departments, as well as several outside agencies, including the NPS. Fischer conducted many cost-effective projects for the NPS with the support of the FSU Academic Diving Program and the students in his classes.

After his retirement from the NPS in 1988, Fischer played a central role in the creation of the Ph.D. program in underwater archaeology at FSU. Suffice it to say that many of George's students have gone on to play important roles in both terrestrial and underwater archaeology in academia, state and federal agencies, non-profits, and cultural resource management. Several have served on the Advisory Council for Underwater Archaeology, as well as on the board and in the presidency of the Society for Historical Archaeology. Whether practicing underwater archaeologists or not, George's classes provided them with the foundation for understanding the place of underwater archaeology in the larger field of archaeology.

Although Fischer was thwarted in his plans to complete his master's thesis at Stanford, he served on many thesis committees while a courtesy adjunct assistant professor at FSU. Those who had George on their committees will remember him as a taskmaster for grammar. I, for one, remember being told that I made him "comma-tose" with my writing. Clearly, the scion of a schoolteacher with a college minor in English had learned his lessons well. Listed below are a small fraction of the theses on which he served as a committee member:

Ball, David A.
1998 Phoenix, and the Confederate Obstructions of Upper Mobile Bay, Alabama (1MB28). Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Damour, Melanie
2002 Looking for HMS *Fox* (1799): A Model for Applying Barrier Island Geomorphology to Shipwreck Survey. Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Logan, Patricia Ann
1977 The *San José y las Animas*: An Analysis of the Ceramic Collections. Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Meide, Chuck
2001 The Archaeology of Economic Transition: The Excavation of the San Marcos Shipwreck, a Mid-Nineteenth Century Merchant Sailing Ship Lost at St. Marks, Florida. Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Skowronek, Russell K.
1982 Trade Patterns of Eighteenth Century Frontier New Spain: The 1733 *Flota* and St. Augustine. Master's thesis, Florida State University, Department of Anthropology, Tallahassee.

Service to the Profession

Fischer chaired the Underwater Archaeology Section of the annual meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology in Washington, D.C., in 1971. Two years later, at the meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota, he was one of the founders of the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA). The founders were known as the "12 apostles," because 12 were in attendance at the meeting! George served as ACUA Treasurer from its founding in 1973 until 2006 and continued thereafter as an emeritus member. Even in retirement his emails to the members in his capacity as their archivist/historian/treasurer reminded everyone of their roots. He saw the ACUA grow in stature enough that in 1987 the name of the annual SHA conference was changed to the Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology. It was at that time that the ACUA formally became a committee of the SHA. This meant that henceforth the membership of the ACUA was to be an elected body of SHA. In 2003 the relationship between SHA and ACUA was further strengthened with the signing of a memorandum of agreement.

In the 1970s and 1980s Fischer served as the New World editor for the *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration*. In the same period George fulfilled similar duties as editor for current research in underwater archaeology for the SHA *Newsletter*. He also served as the program co-chair for underwater archaeology for the 1979 SHA annual meeting in Nashville.

Honors

In the spring of 1999 the late J. Anthony (Tony) Paredes, professor of anthropology, past chair of the anthropology department at FSU, and later NPS ethnologist for the Southeast Region, nominated George for an honorary doctorate from FSU. Many letters were written to Dr. Bernard Sliger, long-time president of FSU. At least one noted: "George sought to transform 'students' into

fledgling 'colleagues,' by involving them in on-going research projects sponsored by the National Park Service" (Skowronek 1999).

Over the following decade George's students repeatedly recognized the seminal role he played in their careers. In March of 2007 the Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program (LAMP) and the St. Augustine Lighthouse Museum awarded Fischer a lifetime achievement award for his "many contributions to the field of underwater archaeology, and to the education of this and future generations of underwater archaeologists." He donated his library to LAMP and it now serves as the core of the George R. Fischer Library of Maritime Archaeology. The following January (2008) Fischer's students held a session in his honor at the SHA's Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology, held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Orchestrated by Melanie Damour, FSU graduate and now marine archaeologist and environmental studies coordinator with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, it was something of a festschrift combined with a roast, as its title, "The Wrecks We've Gone Down on: Papers in Honor of George R. Fischer," suggests.

George had cultivated a reputation as a prankster. If you were at a conference and found a fountain filled with soap bubbles, George may well have been the culprit. He did enjoy a joke. I could tell when he could not sleep because my "in-box" would be filled with a combination of current news on topics pertaining to underwater archaeology, the NPS, and jokes. If there was one thing he loved, it was pyrotechnics. Friday afternoons in the 1970s and early 1980s on the campus of FSU tended to be quiet, except on the ground floor of the Bellamy Building. There the Department of Anthropology and several NPS offices and labs shared several corridors away from the prying eyes of other programs and faculty. Soon these same corridors would reverberate with the explosions of bottle rockets and firecrackers and be filled with the smoke and sulfurous smell of same. On one side would be George and his coterie of students working for the NPS. Facing off against them were Professors Robert Daily and G. Hale Smith and a number of anthropology graduate students. The "battles" would only come to an end when the anthropologists, armed with the Indonesian bronze swivel gun that greeted visitors to the department, set off a deafening explosion that brought the police and ended the on-campus "wars."

In 1982, during a summer project at Fort Jefferson National Monument, the crew illegally brought fireworks to Fort Jefferson to mark the Fourth of July. These included not only bottle rockets and Roman candles, but also "boats that would float and shoot sparks." After being warned by Fischer that no such thing should take place on NPS property, the *entire* crew, including George, decamped to the back side of the fort, far from the prying eyes of the superintendent and his staff, and enjoyed the "show."

The crescendo was reached in 1984 on the way to Moore's Creek Battlefield in North Carolina. Two vehicles exchanged salvos of bottle rockets and firecrackers as they roared up the highway. At some point George dropped a lit M-80 in his vehicle. The ensuing explosion not only deafened him, but made him realize that that should be the end of driving and "bombing."

While these stories were fine for reunions, George Fischer was recognized in the profession as one of its founders. On 8 January 2010 at the 43rd Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology at Amelia Island in northeast Florida, the Society for Historical Archaeology and the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology presented Fischer with the Society for Historical Archaeology's Award of Merit "for his many contributions to the development of underwater archaeology and for his exemplary service on the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology."

As an homage to the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology and to support future students of underwater archaeology, in 2012 George and Nancy Fischer endowed the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology George Fischer Student Travel Award to help fund travel costs for an international student presenting a paper on an underwater or maritime archaeology topic. In addition to the largesse of the Fischers, other individuals and the PAST Foundation continue to support this endeavor.

Retirement

In the years following his retirement from the NPS, George remained busy with the ACUA, teaching, occasional projects, and his voluminous emails and blogs. When not engaged with those things, Nancy and George took cruises and train trips all over the world. These included the Galapagos, Costa Rica, Chile,

Turkey, Bonaire, Norway, Roatán, Italy, India, the British Isles, Norway, France, Polynesia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Iceland, Africa, the Black Sea, and Greece, to name just a few. It was not unusual for them to bring their son Matt and daughter-in-law Teresa and their children. George spoke fondly of the hospitality shown to him and Nancy by George Bass during a visit to Bodrum. I often caught up with them during their trips to see their extended families and Stanford classmates in California or at the SHA meeting.

At his home in Tallahassee George devoted an entire room to an O-gauge railroad layout. He would visit hobby shops during his travels and eventually had 413 cars and engines in his collection.

George's ongoing medical issues came to a head in 2003. With the unshakable support of Nancy he came through that crisis and changed his lifestyle. That said, in 2006 decades of smoking resulted in a bout of throat cancer that he also overcame. He "chugged" along pretty well until 2014, when, as he put it in numerous emails, his "legs stopped working" three times. On 15 January 2016 he wrote to his friends on the ACUA saying that he wished he could have been enjoying the food in Washington, D.C., during the SHA meetings, rather than hospital fare. Three days later he wrote to Toni Carrell to discuss his photograph collection. On 21 March 2016 he sent an upbeat email explaining that the doctors "decided it was pinched nerves in my spine, caused by THREE collapsed vertebrae." He was to undergo a series of surgeries to fix it. He closed by saying: "I'm very pleased about it, as after almost 50 years of living with this, they will finally get my spine fixed, and they assure me medical science has advanced to a point where it isn't a big deal anymore. Hope they are right." Sadly, they were not.

Five days later, on 26 March, George suffered a cardiac arrest. He survived that event only to complain about having his cigars confiscated two weeks later on 18 April. On 3 May George sent his last email to me. As many would guess, it was a joke.

On Sunday afternoon, 27 May, George's son, Matt, called to let me know his father was fading. Subsequently, George channeled Mark Twain's famous line that the "rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated," which buoyed us with hope for a reprieve from the inevitable, but it never came. When it became clear that things would not get better George decided to stop treatment. In Tallahassee on 29 May 2016, at 5:45 PM, George died. He asked that donations be made in his honor to the Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program in St. Augustine. There was an outpouring of testimonials to him from colleagues and friends that appeared in the *Wakulla News*, SubArch, the Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program blog, and emails to many. These included messages from a cross-section of colleagues and past students, including: Glen Doran, Steve Dasovich, Gregg Stanton, Richard Johnson, Richard Vernon, Melanie Damour, Chris Horrell, Chuck Meide, Dave Ball, Dave Brewer, Della Scott-Ireton, Martha Zierden, Amanda Evans, Rochelle Marrinan, Nick Hopkins, Tanya Peres, Mike Faught, Thadra Palmer, Grayal Farr, Hank Kratt, Sam Turner, and Mercedes Harrold. Many attended his memorial service on 1 June, where he was eulogized by his son Matt. Fittingly, the same bronze swivel gun used in the famed bottle-rocket war in Bellamy Hall 35 years earlier was pressed into service one final time, when it was fired in his memory.

George R. Fischer was both wise and a wise guy. He was many things to his family and friends, including son, brother, husband, father, grandfather, and prankster. Those who were fortunate enough to have been his students or to have worked with him knew him as a pioneering figure in American underwater archaeology. He was smart, a good writer and editor, a teacher, a mentor, and, most of all, a friend.

It seems best to remember him in terms of his commitment to his profession. In the penultimate paragraph of his *HMS* Fowey *Lost ... and Found!* George wrote:

> Finally we admonish you to remember, always remember, that scientists, archeologists, and other researchers also have to be accountable for their actions; if for no other reason than simply because they just don't make historic shipwrecks anymore. (Skowronek and Fischer 2009)

We will remember that admonition and, so, remember our mentor, colleague, and friend George R. Fischer.

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