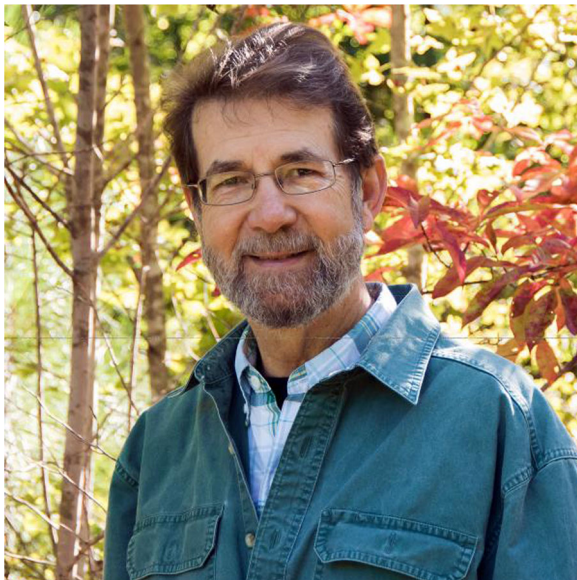


AWARD

## J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology: Leland Greer Ferguson

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In 1963, our laureate, Leland Greer Ferguson, was exposed to the music of the recent Nobel Laureate in Literature, Bob Dylan, and the “Freewheelin’ Leland Ferguson” was launched. Leland, raised near Winston-Salem, North Carolina, was on track to pursue a career in engineering. And although engineering would lose Leland

to archaeology, his experiences as a young man working summer jobs in construction for the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company were to prove important in developing his “worldview” when he committed himself to archaeology. Likewise, the skill set he had from this engineering background served him well in his new field.

First, the entry into archaeology: as an engineer, Leland was adept at surveying and drafting, skills that were best joined in a single person back in the pre-digital, pre-laser days of the 1960s. Leland began collecting arrowheads in the tobacco fields near his house at about the age of 11 and dreamed of becoming an archaeologist as early as 1960, when, after reading Stanley South’s book, *Indians in North Carolina* (1959), he visited Town Creek Indian Mound with his father. For what were probably very rational reasons, Leland did not pursue archaeology at that time and followed the more sensible path of engineering, with the idea of going into aerospace engineering, perhaps following in the wake of the wingbeats of his father, an aviation enthusiast and middle manager at Piedmont Airlines. Leland ultimately finished his master’s of science degree at North Carolina State University with a thesis titled “The Application of the Momentum Integral Method to the Laminar Flow of an Incompressible Fluid in the Entrance Region of a Circular Pipe” (Ferguson 1966). Among other things for which all historical archaeologists can be thankful, Leland became much more concise in his choice of titles for his books—*Uncommon Ground* and *God’s Fields*.

As Leland recounted to me, when he left engineering he felt “complete freedom” and was introduced to

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archaeological work, Bob Dylan, and the Rolling Stones all at the same time, while living in western North Carolina and working at Garden Creek Mounds. Leland worked for Benny Keel under the leadership of crew chief J. Jefferson (Jeff) Reid. Roy Dickens was one of his close friends, and Leland was to continue working in western North Carolina, completing his doctorate on the South Appalachian Mississippian at the University of North Carolina (UNC) under the supervision of Joffre Coe (Ferguson 1971). While studying at UNC, Leland, along with all the archaeology students, took a seminar course with Coe. In this seminar, the advanced students talked about their work, and the new students were given assignments—Leland’s was “Time and Space.” This topic led him to Spaulding’s (1960) “Dimensions of Archaeology,” where Leland focused on “Space, Time and Form.” This, in turn, led Leland to Binford’s (1962, 1964) “Archaeology as Anthropology” and “Archaeological Research Design” articles. When Leland began at UNC, he had been a bit on the fence about whether to follow archaeology or cultural anthropology (something I think can be seen in the way his work developed), and Binford was a big influence leading him to archaeology. So Leland, the eager first-year student, made a presentation to the seminar on the creative ways in which Binford was revolutionizing archaeology, and it seemed to have been well received. Only after class did Roy Dickens take Leland aside and explain that Binford used to be a student at UNC, and, because he left, “we don’t talk about him.” Yet the evolutionary ecology approach that characterized much of the “new archaeology” was dissatisfying to Leland, and when he read Deetz’s 1965 Arikara study, Leland was excited to see archaeologists attempting to get at social relations, rather than simply explaining environmental and ecological relationships.

Leland’s first position was at Florida Atlantic University, working for archaeologist William Sears. Then, in 1972, Leland came to work at the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA). His goal was to continue working on southeastern Mississippian village settlement patterns (Ferguson 1976, 1987; Ferguson and Green 1984). Recognizing that most Mississippian mound sites were known, Leland plotted them and found that the sites in the mountains were more densely packed, and that a nearest-neighbor analysis showed the mounds to be about a two-day’s walk apart, leading to catchments of about a day’s walk for each mound complex. Robert Stephenson, the

director of SCIAA, gave Leland an assignment to excavate at a mound in the coastal plain of South Carolina, at Fort Watson (Ferguson 1975, 1977a). At Fort Watson, Leland the Mississippian specialist was confronted with a large mound, but on top of it was a Revolutionary War fortification. To Leland’s great credit, he determined that there was no way he could simply blow through the historical period site on top of this mound, and therefore he had to devote time to that component as well. It is a testament to Leland’s careful work studying the pattern of spent vs. unfired musket and rifle balls that he was able to identify the location of the sharpshooting tower that was constructed to fire directly into the fort on the summit of the mound (Ferguson 1977a). Years later, Steve Smith, now director of SCIAA, worked at Fort Motte, a contemporary Revolutionary War site, and, using Leland’s Fort Watson data, Steve and his student Stacey Whitacre were able to identify the presence of the same rifle and likely the same sharpshooter at both sites (Whitacre 2013).

Fort Watson was to be a turning point for Leland, in that he started to mess about with historical archaeology, and by the mid-1970s was beginning to publish in the field. Working at SCIAA with Stanley South, Leland was certainly at one of the founts of knowledge in the field, and Stanley first invited Leland to contribute some of his Fort Watson material to the *Conference on Historic Site Archaeology Papers* (Ferguson 1975) and later to South’s edited book, *Research Strategies in Historical Archeology* (Ferguson 1977a; South 1977b). In 1974, with the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) planning to meet in Charleston, South Carolina, and perhaps because Stanley was deeply enmeshed in publishing *Method and Theory in Historical Archeology* (South 1977a) and *Research Strategies*, Stanley asked Leland to organize the plenary session of the 1975 conference. Little did Stanley, or Leland, realize that this simple act would help change the direction of the field of historical archaeology in fundamental and irreversible ways. The volume published as a result of this plenary session is still regarded by many historical archaeologists as the signpost leading historical archaeology away from its processual focus of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and toward an interpretive, humanistic, and, although the term had not yet been coined, postprocessual outlook that characterizes the field to this day. At the time, Stanley was expecting that the SHA plenary session would be the grand unveiling of the results of the scientific, hypothesis-testing historical

archaeology he had been advocating for some years. Leland, however, had been hearing from Stanley for several years about Stanley's view of where historical archaeology should be going (anyone who ever spent any time at SCIAA knows that it was hard *not* to hear from Stanley). While speaking with Leland to prepare these remarks, Leland confessed to me that he has always had a problem with preachers, and that unease extended to the new archaeology, ecological approaches, Marxist archaeology, and so forth. Leland wanted a variety of people and not a lineup of speakers repeating the same party line. This was at the time he was "becoming" an historical archaeologist, and so he worked to assemble a list of people he wanted to hear. Leland, who had once been an aspiring journalist (for which we as archaeologists can be thankful, as his work remains among the most readable in historical archaeology), had been considerably influenced by James Deetz, in large part due to the clarity of his writing, and invited him. Binford was selected for the session as well. It is often forgotten that Binford really did talk about people in a lot of his work. Leland invited Henry Glassie, who impressed him with his erudite, broad, liberal understanding that drew from both the humanities and the social sciences, though Leland never saw him again after that meeting. Mark Leone brought his perspective on the Mormon Temple in Washington, D.C. Leland hoped to have David Clarke contribute and sought to have Robert Ascher as well, as Ascher was the first archaeologist, in Leland's view, to expand archaeology in directions that are now the norm in the field. Many of us of "a certain age" can attest that the publication of the papers from the session, as edited by Leland in *Historical Archaeology and the Importance of Material Things* (Ferguson 1977b), marked a sea change in the field. Much to Stanley's chagrin, Leland helped move historical archaeology away from the strict hypothetico-deductive model and toward a more diverse, inclusive, and humanistic set of approaches.

This leads to another important chapter in Leland's career, a chapter that has profoundly influenced many of us in the field of historical archaeology. Although there had been fits and starts in the development of an archaeology of African Americans, Leland, with his work on colonoware pottery in the South Carolina Lowcountry, was among the first to recognize slavery as the "elephant in the room" of historical archaeology (Ferguson 1980, 1982). Yes, others had investigated enslaved African sites (notably Ascher and Fairbanks [1971]), but, in

my view at least, one of the significant contributions of Leland's work was to suggest that the material traces of the *actions* of enslaved Africans were hiding in plain sight in the Lowcountry of South Carolina. This simple question, asking whether some of the colonoware pottery was made and used by Africans, revolutionized the way many archaeologists thought about the African presence in the colonial world (Ferguson 1980, 1984).

As Leland tells it in *Uncommon Ground* (Ferguson 1992), he came to the question based on the observations that, because so much of this relatively undifferentiated low-fired pottery was recovered from slave village sites, there must have been a connection. He came to this conclusion because in 1977 he left SCIAA in large part because he was "promoted" to associate director, and, not wanting to transition to administration, he quit and built barns for a year. At that time he was thinking about pulling an "Ascher"—switching from anthropology and archaeology to folklore. In thinking this through, he audited Karl Heider's undergraduate folklore course at the University of South Carolina, and in that course Karl discussed Lowcountry basketry and the work folklorists had done to establish the baskets' connection to West Africa. That got Leland thinking: maybe all the plain earthenware that was literally flooding the curation facilities at SCIAA was, like the basketry, made by Africans. Leland presented this to the class, and Karl Heider encouraged Leland to write proposals to study the hypothesis, proposals he prepared and submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Science Foundation. The NEH funding led Leland to conduct research in collections in South Carolina, Virginia, and Florida. Leland thought this work would be done in 1980 or 1981, but it was not to work out that way.

Leland's work with colonoware pottery opened the door to several major theoretical directions in historical archaeology. While often viewed as the person who argued the case that colonoware was made by enslaved Africans and their descendants, Leland actually suggested that the origins of colonoware were much more complex, being produced by Africans and Native Americans with some influence from Europeans (Ferguson and Green 1983; Ferguson 1989, 1991, 1992, 2007b). Furthermore, the significance of Leland's colonoware research lies in the way his work compelled others to think about alternative explanations for the context of some of the colonoware recovered by divers in South Carolina rivers. Leland argued that some examples,

particularly those with X marks incised on their bases, may have been intentionally cast adrift as spiritual offerings aligned with West and West Central African-derived cosmology and ritual practices (Ferguson 1999, 2007a). His creative thinking in this realm has spawned a diverse and exciting range of research in archaeological contexts throughout the African diaspora.

Leland's thinking about the way in which colonoware pots might have been used in Lowcountry South Carolina led him to travel to Sierra Leone in 1991 and with Christopher R. DeCorse of Syracuse University in the fall of 1993. Leland had just published *Uncommon Ground*, and DeCorse and Leland were invited by the U.S. embassy in Freetown to come and undertake a preliminary assessment of the archaeological potential of Bunce Island, the location of a major slave-trading post from which many captive Africans were shipped to South Carolina. DeCorse's interest was in the trading establishment at Bunce Island and its relationship with the surrounding region, an area he had last visited in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Leland was interested in the ways that pottery was used by people who were the descendants of those whose compatriots and family members might have been enslaved. While Leland was intrigued to see the ways traditional pots were still employed, particularly in ritual and medicinal uses, the Sierra Leone civil war, family, and professional issues prevented Leland from returning to follow up on his initial observations in Sierra Leone.

During the 1990s, as Leland was transitioning from working with colonoware and conducting field-school excavations at Middleburg Plantation (field schools that trained many of the historical archaeologists working in the Southeast) (Ferguson 2016), Leland began to take on the administrative work he had tried to avoid more than a decade before. Leland was elected SHA president and served from 1991 to 1993. Following his service to the SHA, Leland became chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Carolina (where he had been teaching full time since 1979) and played a key role in laying the foundation for the doctoral program that was finally approved and began admitting students in 2006. Leland's impact on the field is also demonstrated by the more than 35 master's students he supervised in the anthropology department there, many of whom became key archaeologists throughout the Southeast and beyond, and many of whom pursued doctorates in anthropology.

Leland talks about how his transition to African American archaeology was influenced by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War (Ferguson 1992). To hear him, he was not an activist, but became swayed. Leland grew up in the segregated South and, in fact, became aware of the injustices of the Jim Crow system during his first employment as an engineering student. Before he made his switch to archaeology, Leland had held a summer job in construction, working for R. J. Reynolds Tobacco in Winston-Salem. There were several crews working this job: the steel crew, which placed reinforcing steel and on which Leland chose to work; the carpentry crew; and the labor crew. The first two were White, the third was Black. The crews would get 15 min. breaks morning and afternoon. On the breaks, the White crews would go for coffee and pie at a nearby café and would often stay 25 or 30 min. The members of the labor crew would stop at the same time and take their break on the job site with whatever they had brought along. Although Leland says he was not an activist, he was already thinking. He asked about pay and found that, uniformly, the African American workers received \$1.50 an hour, which was minimum wage, regardless of age or how long they had worked for Reynolds. Leland, a college kid, got \$1.72 an hour. That was the world at the time. When Leland was pursuing his graduate degree in engineering, he was president of the professional engineering fraternity. The fraternity held its meetings at the S&S Cafeteria in Raleigh, North Carolina, where the members would have a meal and then a speaker. One evening they had invited social scientist Allard Lowenstein to speak, and he did not show up. As they were getting ready to go, Lowenstein arrived and said that he refused to eat there, as it was a segregated cafeteria. He then commenced speaking and talked for nearly two hours. Lowenstein had been in South West Africa (now Namibia) studying apartheid (Lowenstein 1962). Leland left the meeting stunned. Here he had grown up in North Carolina and never thought about segregation and its similarity to apartheid.

In common with many people in the South, Leland's heritage is complicated. His maternal grandmother was from Pembroke, North Carolina, which is the center of the Lumbee group of Native Americans. In the 19th century she was classified in the census as a "Mulatto," and, in 1900, the first year North Carolina had such a category, she was called "Indian." She eventually married and moved to Laurinburg, North Carolina, where



she and her family were accepted as White. Leland knew his family included Indians and thought that was cool. Perhaps it is this background that helped Leland to express such a nuanced view of Africans in South Carolina, as demonstrated in *Uncommon Ground*. In his writings on colonoware, one thing that struck me was the way he referred to Africans in the Lowcountry as “pioneers” (Ferguson 1980, 1992). This word, seemingly minor, is, in fact, significant. Rather than focusing on a legal status, “pioneer” shifted the focus to action and implicitly cast Africans and their descendants in the Lowcountry as actors in a most fundamental way—people who, in their groups of family and friends, created the world in which they lived.

Perhaps Leland’s complicated family history played a role in his work at Old Salem. Certainly this was a very real “return” to his home—the work at St. Phillip’s Church was only a few miles from where he grew up and eight blocks south of where he had worked on the construction crew in the early 1960s. But St. Phillip’s also allowed Leland to explore the fluidity of race and how notions of it change, as they did among the Moravians of Salem (Ferguson 2011). After all, Leland’s own family had seen the way they were considered by others and by themselves change over time. Leland’s 20 years of work at Salem was focused on thinking about the way Moravians shifted from a largely egalitarian sect to one that embraced the racist ideologies of slavery and segregation characteristic of the surrounding communities. He explored this through the study of St. Phillip’s Church and the strangers’ burying ground, as it became identified with enslaved Africans in the Moravian community. In *God’s Fields*, Leland (2011) explored this history from the founding of Salem in the 1760s through the 20th century, when the Moravian church worked to conceal its segregationist past. His work at St. Phillip’s contributed to the Moravian Church in North America’s formal apology in 2006 for its participation in slavery. As Leland said to me, when he was growing up everybody in his world was racist—and I think it can be seen that much of Leland’s contribution to historical archaeology over his career has attempted to remedy that situation. As archaeologists and anthropologists I think we are all better for that, and the SHA recognizes Leland Greer Ferguson for his gift with the award of the 2017 J. C. Harrington Medal for a lifetime of contributions to historical archaeology as we know it today.

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