

J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology

CHARLES H. FAIRBANKS

1983



Charles H. Fairbanks was honored at the 1983 annual SHA meetings in Denver, Colorado, as the first recipient to receive the Society's J. C. Harrington medal in recognition of his contributions to the field of historical archaeology.

Fairbanks' formal training in Anthropology began at the University of Chicago, from which he received the A.B. degree in 1939. As a student at Chicago, he was exposed to the teaching and research of such influential anthropologists as Fay Cooper-Cole, Robert Redfield, Radcliffe-Browne, Harry Hoijer, and Thorne Deuel. Cole, however, was his primary source of guidance, and it was he who sent Fairbanks to gain some of his first professional experience with the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1937-1938. In 1939 after graduating from Chicago, Fairbanks went to Ocmulgee National Monument, Macon, Georgia, as an archeologist.

During his five years at Macon he worked on the sites of the Creek earthlodge and on the funeral mound, which was later to become the topic of his dissertation. One of the contributions to American archaeology in general made by the large, government sponsored Works Project Administration excavations was the development and refinement of a rigorous and painstaking field methodology. Fairbanks had a significant part in this development and subsequently brought this precision to some of the earliest historical archaeology in the East.

It was also in Macon that Chuck Fairbanks met Evelyn Adams Timmerman, to whom he was married in 1941. Evelyn was introduced early to the rigours of being married to an archaeologist. It was on their wedding day, in fact, that young park archaeologist Fairbanks was summoned to give a tour of the Mounds to Dr. Margaret Mead, who happened to be in the area. Fairbanks gave the tour and made it to the wedding on time. Forty-one years later, Evelyn has seen first hand—and lived at—a respectable portion of the archaeological sites and academic institutions of Florida and Georgia.

Fairbanks spent three years, 1943 to 1945, in the Army, but continued his archaeological career after his military service at Frederica, Georgia, one of the early major historic sites to be excavated in the Southeast. Fairbanks was the Park superintendent and archaeologist at Frederica from 1946 to 1948, and his excavation at the Hawkins-Davison House there was an important event in the development of recovery, recording, and interpretive methods on historic sites. His involvement—and that of his students—has continued at Frederica to the present day.

From Frederica Fairbanks went to the University of Michigan to do graduate work in Anthropology. There he became involved with James B. Griffin and the group of archaeologists—formerly at Chicago—who were subsequently to play a major developmental role in historic and prehistoric southeastern archaeology. While pursuing his graduate studies, Fairbanks returned to Ocmulgee National Monument where he developed the museum and park exhibits.

After receiving his Ph.D. from Michigan in 1954, he began his teaching career at Florida State University. His approach to student training has been that of complete—but supervised—involvement of his students in all phases of archaeological research including publication of the final results. Like his teacher, Fay Cooper-Cole, he maintains a personal interest in the welfare of the students. While at FSU he trained students on several historical sites, including Horseshoe Bend, Alabama, and Fort St. Marks near Tallahassee. Also in Florida, surrounded by such colleagues as John Griffin, Hale Smith, and John Goggin, Fairbanks began his lifelong involvement in Spanish colonial studies.

In 1963 Fairbanks left FSU to assume direction of the Anthropology department at the University of Florida, then headed by John Goggin. During Fairbanks' eight years as chair, the department developed M.A. and Ph.D. programs, grew from a faculty of 3 to 11, and established a national reputation as one of the first programs of graduate study in historical archaeology. In 1976 Fairbanks was named a Distinguished Service Professor of the State System of Florida. During the early years in Gainesville, he also was a founding member of the Society for Historical Archaeology, served on its first Board of Directors, and was the Society's fourth president.

At the University of Florida Fairbanks maintained his active involvement in historical archaeological research and the ethnohistory of Florida's native groups. The archaeology of slavery and plantation life was initiated, and his pioneering study of slave life at Kingsley Plantation, Florida, took place in 1967 and 1968. This was followed by his work with Robert Ascher on Cumberland Island, Georgia, and later by the work at Butler Plantation on St. Simon's Island, Georgia. Through his continuing involvement in this area, and the work of his students trained at these sites, his influence in this area of historical archaeology has extended throughout the United States.

His role as a leader in Spanish colonial archaeology has also continued to this day through his research and the work of his students in mission sites, Spanish domestic sites, and material studies. "Backyard archaeology" as a research strategy for historical archaeology was introduced with his initial work in 1972 in St. Augustine. That research has also been continued since then through the work of his students. More recently, the project at Puerto Real, Haiti, under his direction has initiated processually-oriented, systematic historical research in the Spanish Caribbean.

Students have been a continuous feature of Fairbanks' career since 1954. He has directed more than 20 masters and 11 doctoral students, a majority of whom have concentrated in historical archaeology. His role in encouraging women in archaeology should also be noted. During the 1960's and early 1970's—when opportunities for women archaeologists were somewhat more limited—Fairbanks provided support and encouragement for equal numbers of men and women students. Seven of his 11 Ph.D. graduates, in fact, have been women.

One student-initiated Florida institution that cannot go unmentioned is the Annual Charles H. Fairbanks Armadillo Roast. Now in its twelfth year, the Armadillo Roast is put on each year by the students in honor of Fairbanks' birthday. Each roast has an official T-shirt, and an entire assemblage of them is now highly collectible.

Through his work over the last four decades, Charles Fairbanks has brought to the field of historical archaeology a unique and workable integration of scientific methods and humanistic perception. Because of this, because of his pioneering work in the archaeology of disenfranchised historic groups, and because of his direct influence on the present generation of historical archaeologists, he has been awarded the 1983 J. C. Harrington award for outstanding contribution to the field of historical archaeology.