

J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology

Arthur Woodward

1987



Arthur Woodward died in Tucson, Arizona on January 24, 1986. He was 87 years old. With his passing, historical archaeology lost one of its true pioneers and most colorful practitioners.

He was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on April 18, 1898 of "fiddle-footed ancestry," as he liked to say, "who began in New England and ended in California over a period of some two hundred years." After a stint with the 20th Regular Infantry during World War I, Woodward studied history under Herbert E. Bolton and anthropology under Alfred E. Kroeber at the University of California at Berkeley. In 1922 he headed east where his first important paying job was as a reporter for the *New York Evening Journal*. This was followed by a brief time as a member of the research staff of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, in New York. In 1925 he moved to work as a curator at the Los Angeles County Museum.

During World War II, Woodward served with the Office of Strategic Services, opening the first O.S.S. offices in Los Angeles. He was then attached to the U.S. Navy and spent three months on Admiral Richard Byrd's staff in the Southeast Pacific on a top secret presidential mission.

After retiring from an interrupted 25-year stint as Chief Curator of History and Anthropology at the Los Angeles County Museum, in 1961 the University of Arizona awarded him an honorary doctorate (Litt. D.). He relocated to southern Arizona, building a home and library in the rural community of Patagonia. From there he commuted regularly to Tucson and the University of Arizona where in the spring semester of 1964 he inaugurated a course in historical archaeology, one of the first such courses offered in the United States. He proved himself in that one-semester offering to be a walking, talking encyclopaedia, one who, without benefit of notes, happily turned the pages for his awe-stricken students. Like the content in his many dozens of books and articles, subjects ranged from porcupine quill work and Indian houses in Southern California to Indian uses of the silver gorget, Mexican pottery making, and Indian trade goods.

Woodward was well known in California mission circles for his work as a member of the Advisory Committee for the restoration of Mission La Purísima Concepción. He was once chairman of the Los Angeles Landmarks Committee and in 1935 he was the historian and archaeologist accompanying a National Park Service expedition to the missions of northern Sonora, Mexico. His account of that trip was translated into Spanish and published under the auspices of the Governor of Sonora in 1983 as *Misiones del Norte de Sonora: aspectos históricos y arqueológicos*.

Art Woodward wrote the pioneer work, *A Brief History of Navajo Silversmithing* (1938); the section on Spanish-period artifacts in Charles C. DiPeso's *The Sobaipuri Indians of the Upper San Pedro River Valley, Southeastern Arizona* (1953); and *Indian Trade Goods* (1967). Subjects on which he was among the country's leading experts and about which he wrote articles included antler implements; Karok dance paraphernalia; shell work of California Indians; Aztec feather working; the use of coral in the Southwest; catlinite; glass beads; wampum; California Mexican-period costume; horse furniture; Green River knives; Spanish and Mexican brands; ox carts and other horse-drawn wheeled vehicles; Spanish-period military paraphernalia; and much more.

By the time of his death in 1986, Woodward had put together a private library of more than 24,000 volumes, all of which were given to the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson. He also left behind thousands of note cards and photographs of a wide range of museum specimens from all over the world, everything from glass beads to silver gorgets.

Although he was a Renaissance man who failed to differentiate conceptually among history, anthropology, and archaeology, much less historical archaeology, Woodward's influence on the course of historical archaeology cannot be measured. Those who were fortunate enough to have taken or audited his course in 1964, to say nothing of the hundreds of people who had occasion to consult with him or simply to listen to him in conversation, have included countless dozens of persons whose own careers and contributions to historical archaeology were shaped by those moments.

In the eulogy delivered by a relative at the wake Art had prearranged for the occasion, those present were told Art had been asked before his death how he wanted to be remembered among his relatives, friends, and colleagues. His answer, with the twinkle in his eye: was: "As that old bastard!"

He will always be remembered, and loved, by all who knew him as "that old bastard," but also as one of the fathers of historical archaeology.