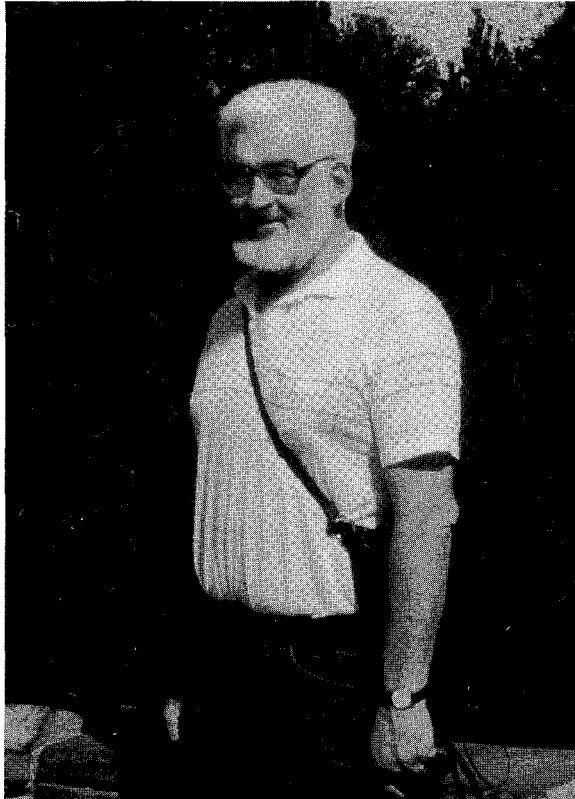


Memorial
JOHN H. RICK, 1934–1993



John H. Rick on holiday at Mt. Rushmore, South Dakota, 1988. (Photo by DiAnn Herst.)

When John Rick passed away suddenly on Christmas Eve of 1993, friends and colleagues in the fields of historical archaeology and heritage preservation lost an effective and indefatigable supporter, and one whose professional life was dominated by the compulsion to build and maintain solid organizations based on high standards of research and publication. Adding poignancy to his untimely death was our knowledge that he had been expected to appear at the 1994 Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology in Vancouver, B.C., to accept the SHA's Award of Merit on behalf of Parks Canada for distinguished contributions to the field of historical archaeology.

Between 1959, when he obtained his M.A. in anthropology from the University of Toronto, and 1961, when he joined what is today Parks Canada as its first full-time archaeologist, John spent two seasons

excavating at Tikal, Guatemala, for the University of Pennsylvania Museum. He worked for a time as an assistant field director for the North Dakota State Historical Society, as an instructor for the University of North Dakota's archaeological field school, and as a specimen analyst at the University of Florida's zooarchaeological lab. In between, he acquired experience in archaeological survey work for the Saskatchewan government and on various digs with the Royal Ontario Museum.

When he was recruited by Parks Canada in 1961, John was handed a daunting mission best expressed, with only modest exaggeration, as, "Add water and stir. We need archaeological capability on a nation-wide scale—fast." To its credit, Parks gave John his lead, and his energy, commitment, and indomitable debating ability did the rest. By 1967, after six years of recruiting, and occasionally directing field excavations personally, he was chief of an expanding division with a laboratory, large artifact collections, and a growing pool of staff experience with sites that ranged from 17th-century settlements on the Atlantic Coast to late 19th-century police posts in the Canadian West. The vexing problems of jurisdiction over underwater sites and the challenge of recording and studying materials from wrecks had, by this time, become a constructive preoccupation for John, and the Parks Canada underwater archaeology unit was already on its way to becoming a recognized leader in that specialty.

In 1967, John assumed enlarged responsibilities as Chief of Research, managing Parks Canada's activities in historical research, architectural history, and publishing, as well as the operations of the Archaeological Research Branch. Later still he conceived and pushed through the creation of a conservation laboratory that became one of the best in Canada. He supported a strong publishing role for all research disciplines in Parks, and in the 1960s launched three ongoing series of professional publications. John continued in this complex role until 1981, with the additional duty of providing functional guidance on research matters to the five Parks Canada regional offices that had been created between 1974 and 1979, each with its own archaeological staff and historical research unit.

John's tireless work was recognized by the profession at large in 1969, when he was elected as the third president of the Society for Historical Archaeology. He subsequently strongly encouraged his staff to take an active role in the Society, with the result that a number of individuals did exactly that, two going on to become presidents, themselves.

In 1981, John branched out into strikingly different areas, accepting assignments in the varied areas of environmental assessment, policy writing, and strategic planning, both in Parks Canada and in its then-parent department, Environment Canada. The reasons had to do with the very qualities that had made him an effective leader and innovator in the research disciplines. John was above all a builder, a creator of things organizational, moving ahead restlessly, devising rigorous standards, cajoling heterogenous researchers into interdisciplinary cooperation, pushing staff to professional accomplishments they had not known were within their capacities, and establishing new units and techniques as the national historic sites system expanded and Parks Canada's archaeological, conservation, and historical research tasks became more voluminous. When the economic recession that began to invade Canada in the later 1970s deepened into the pervasive governmental retrenchment of the 1980s, Parks's research units suffered along with other parts of the program. But because they were solidly established and working to capacity, they were at least safe from crippling cutbacks. Growth was over, though, and the means no longer existed to conquer new worlds. While he returned to Parks Canada from time to time to address crucial cultural resource issues, John spent most of the last decade of his life pursuing his second area of interest: the analysis of global environmental and socioeconomic issues.

John's contribution to the field of historical archaeology, like his accomplishments in the broader areas of cultural resource management, lies in having had the faith and having kept it. Historical archaeology, no less than other professions, knows little of national or geographical boundaries. When he began his work in Parks Canada in 1961, it had no archaeological equipment beyond the shovels stored in maintenance sheds, and the discipline itself was still in its infancy in Canada. The staff John built up had

an international composition, with all the exciting intellectual ferment that rising young professionals intermingled with seasoned hands can create in a virtually new world.

Of course, the task he undertook was not always easy. Parks generally endorsed John's incisively eloquent calls for good equipment, careful excavation, reputable publications, and well-funded studies of material culture. However, even enlightened bureaucracies harbor bean counters, and they descended periodically on the research branches, acronym-clad crusaders determined to prove—their crystal balls to the contrary—that management is a science and that the research units, staffed with people who often acted as if they might be enjoying their work, must be a costly and unnecessary luxury. In the 1960s came “program management evaluation,” followed by “management by objectives” (MBO), then “zero-based budgeting” (ZBB), and latterly “value for money” (“Why can't you sell the artifacts, or just rebury them?”). Each time, John answered the evaluators and auditors with his carefully sculptured but unemotional and remorselessly logical prose. Usually he won hands down, because no one knew how to refute such a resolutely rational debater—quite aside from the fact that John was a big man with unwavering eyes and a disconcertingly commanding presence.

In standing firm, John Rick did the world of research a great favor, leaving the largest heritage agency in Canada with the means to practice informed, knowledge-based cultural resource management. Thanks to his vision and energy, the value of both historical and native-site archaeology to the understanding and preservation of heritage is now as firmly planted in the consciousness of Parks Canada's nationwide staff as the foundations of our many excavated national historic sites are embedded in the soil.

MAX SUTHERLAND

[Karlis Karklins deserves thanks for facilitating the development of this memorial to his late colleague.—
Memorials Editor]

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