

## Memorial

Kathleen Kirk Gilmore, 1914–2010



FIGURE 1. Kathleen Kirk Gilmore at the site of La Salle's Fort St. Louis in Texas, Victoria County. (Photo courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission, 1997.)

On 18 March 2010, Kathleen Kirk Gilmore, a leading figure in Texas Spanish- and French-colonial archaeology, died at the age of 95. At the time of her passing, Gilmore was actively working on a book about the 18th-century Spanish captain Felipe de Rábago y Terán, who commanded the San Xavier and San Sabá missions in central Texas. Despite her age and troubling physical ailments, Gilmore remained active in historical archaeology until the very end of her life. Gilmore is survived by daughters Judy Gilmore Lephien and Pat Gilmore, brother Rufus P. Kirk, five grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Gilmore began her professional career not as an archaeologist but as a geologist. Although she was fascinated by archaeology as a young girl, she was discouraged from entering the field. Instead she pursued a college education in geology—a decision made during the depths of the Great Depression to ensure employment in the burgeoning oil-exploration business (Tunnell 2003:5). Upon graduation from the University of Oklahoma with a B.S. in geology, however, Gilmore found it difficult to find work in the male-dominated petroleum geology field. Faced with a need to make a living, Gilmore entered business school, and learned shorthand and typing.

Gilmore's first job with an oil company came in the late 1930s, when she moved to Houston to work as a stenographer for Humble Oil Company (Tunnell 2003:5). Although Gilmore hated the job, the company was happy to find a typist who knew geological terms. She eventually moved up to work in the oil fields, which she did until 1940 when she married Robert Gilmore, also a petroleum geologist.

After raising a family of four daughters, Gilmore decided finally to pursue her dream of becoming an archaeologist. She joined the Texas Archeological Society (TAS) and the Dallas Archeological Society to learn about the discipline. In 1962 she attended the TAS's first field school, when the historical Native American Gilbert site was excavated. There she learned how to conduct field excavations under the direction of Ed Jelks, who was to become her mentor and lifelong friend. The Gilbert site was excavated at a time when historical archaeology was in its infancy, and the experience instilled in Gilmore a keen interest in historical-period sites, where documentary evidence could be used to understand the archaeological record better.

In 1963, Gilmore entered the newly created graduate program in anthropology at Southern Methodist University (SMU). During the fall of 1966, she attended a graduate seminar in historical archaeology taught by Ed Jelks, then teaching at SMU. Based on her work in this course and after Jelks's encouragement, she developed a passion for locating and investigating Texas Spanish-colonial archaeological sites using primary source documents (Gilmore 1969:1). In 1967 she published her first historical archaeological report, based on fieldwork conducted at Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas and a search for the nearby Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá, both in central Texas (Gilmore 1967). In this report, she developed a process for using historical documents to formulate a conceptual model of what was to be expected in the archaeological record. This was a methodology that she would use throughout her career to guide her archaeological investigations.

Her next field project occurred a year later when she sought to locate the sites associated with the San Xavier mission complex. The complex consisted of the San Ildefonso, Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria, and San Francisco Xavier de Horcasitas missions, and the San Francisco Xavier de Gagedo presidio (Figure 2). Following her methodology of studying the documentary records to formulate a model, Gilmore proposed where the sites should be located. She field tested the model and found all three missions, and possibly the presidio (Gilmore 1969). This project became the topic of her master's thesis at the Department of Anthropology at SMU (Gilmore 1968).

Gilmore next became involved in some early contract archaeology work, conducting excavations on Caddoan sites at Lake Palestine (Anderson et al. 1974) and investigating a shell midden at Lake Wallisville (Gilmore 1974a). She wrote about the work at Lake Palestine in her doctoral dissertation (Gilmore 1973b).

The work on Caddoan sites at Lake Palestine caused Gilmore to think for a time that she wanted to pursue Caddoan archaeology as her focus, but it was not long before she was back in historical archaeology. Curtis Tunnell, then Texas state archaeologist, and Jelks, then at Illinois State University, suggested to Gilmore that she analyze artifacts that had been collected from excavations at Fort St. Louis, the site of Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle's ill-fated Gulf Coast colony.

In 1685 La Salle had landed on the central Texas coast in an attempt to establish a French colony to control trade along the Mississippi River. Not realizing that he had missed the Mississippi by more than 400 mi., he constructed a small fortification near the modern town of Victoria, Texas. After a few years La Salle was assassinated by his men and the colony failed. Historians had long speculated on the location of the colony, but without conclusive proof the location of the site remained in dispute. In 1950 the Texas Memorial Museum conducted excavations at the Keeran site, on a ranch along Garcitas Creek in southeast Texas. The work, directed by Glenn Evans, recovered several thousand artifacts, but no analysis was completed and a report was not written. Tunnell and Jelks thought that the artifacts from the site might answer the question of whether the site was the location of Fort St. Louis.

Gilmore took on the project. After analyzing the artifacts, she published her study of the Keeran site, entitling it *The Keeran Site: The Probable Site of La Salle's Fort St. Louis in Texas* (Gilmore 1973a). In her report she noted that some green-glazed ceramics found were "probably of French derivation" (Gilmore 1973a:36). Some years later, she reflected on her tentative conclusions about the Keeran site as "probably" the location of Fort St. Louis. She sent one of the green-glazed ceramics



FIGURE 2. Kathleen Kirk Gilmore and Doug Markwell excavating a burial at Mission San Francisco, Milam County, Texas. (Photo by Robert Gilmore, 1968.)

to Gerard Gusset at Parks Canada. He replied that the sherd was definitely of French origin, and was from the Saintonge region of southwestern France. Gilmore wrote a new paper, titling this one as, more definitively, *La Salle's Fort St. Louis in Texas* (Gilmore 1986), declaring her new confidence that the Keeran site was indeed the location of the French colony.

Gilmore's next major Spanish colonial excavation was in 1973–1974 at Mission de Nuestra Señora del Rosario. This mission was established in 1754 and closed in 1806. Her work—focused inside the walled compound and identified several stone building foundations (Gilmore 1974b, 1974c). She identified several construction phases of the mission that matched archival documents about the development and ultimate decline of the site.

In 1974 Gilmore accepted an appointment as adjunct professor of archaeology and research archaeologist with the Institute of Applied Sciences at the University of North Texas in Denton. This position allowed her to continue to work on a variety of historical archaeology projects in Texas. Much of her Texas work involved CRM projects in which she would direct the historical archaeology. She did this for investigations at Lakeview Lake, Granger Reservoir, North Fork Reservoir, and Lake Ray Roberts. She also established and directed the Red River Archaeology Project, a program to conduct surveys and other research into archaeological sites along the Red River of Texas and Oklahoma. She had long felt that the archaeology of this portion of the Red River, crossing east–west across the southern plains, had received too little attention. This important work brought more attention to the area's rich archaeological heritage.

Two investigations took Gilmore to other states. In 1978 she conducted survey and testing in North Carolina at the Single Brothers industrial complex in Old Salem; and in 1981 she undertook archaeological testing in Louisiana at Fort St. Leon, the location of both a French and an American fort at English Turn on the Mississippi River.

In addition to her own projects, Gilmore was a consultant on many projects conducted by other investigators. Starting in the mid-1990s she worked with Jim Bruseth as a research consultant on the excavation of the shipwreck *La Belle*. *La Belle* was a ship lost in 1686 by La Salle along the Texas coast. The ship was discovered in 1995 by the Texas Historical Commission (THC) and excavated in 1996–1997 inside a steel cofferdam with the seawater pumped out (Bruseth and Turner 2005). Then in 1999, the THC undertook a major reexcavation of Fort St. Louis, with the fieldwork continuing until 2002. This work fully supported Gilmore's earlier finding that the Keeran site was the location of La Salle's Fort St. Louis. Further archaeological evidence for La Salle's French fort was found, along with the remains of Nuestra Señora de Loreto en la Bahía, a Spanish presidio built over the French fort. During both projects, Gilmore was a constant source of guidance and inspiration. A particularly memorable experience for the senior author was traveling to France with Gilmore to visit places where ceramics and other artifacts excavated had been made.

Beginning in 1993, Gilmore served as the lead consultant to a team of archaeologists and researchers, including one of the junior authors (Hindes), in an effort to locate the site of the Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá, the Spanish mission on which she had first reported in 1967. Relying heavily on Gilmore's previous archival research and field search, the team rediscovered the site of the mission, known as the "Missing Mission of Texas," in an alfalfa field east of Menard, Texas. Gilmore's contributions to the project were enormous, including financial support for the search, which she later termed "Mission Impossible."

In 1997 and 1998, Gilmore also served as project advisor to the TAS archaeological field investigations at the site of 41VT10, the second location of Mission Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga, in Victoria, Texas. Officially founded in 1722, the mission was moved in ca. 1725 from Garcitas Creek to a site on the Guadalupe River in current-day Victoria City Park. One of the highlights of the field investigations was a visit to the site by Ed Jelks, reuniting the two friends and colleagues.

In her last years, Gilmore conducted archival research on presidios in Texas with emphasis on places that Rábago y Terán had commanded. The Texas Presidios Project, which Gilmore initiated and supported, focused on recovering documents from archives in Spain, Mexico, and Italy. In 2008 she traveled to Seville to work in the Archivo General de Indias. Working with a translator and paleographer, Gilmore slowly translated documents that chronicled Rábago y Terán's activities at both Presidio San Xavier and Presidio San Sabá. Intrigued by the accounts of Rábago y Terán's contemptible behavior, she began writing a book based on this research. Although not complete at the time of her passing, the book will be published posthumously using Gilmore's lengthy notes and detailed research. While Rábago y Terán was a major focus of the Texas Presidios Project, the research Gilmore helped to support is also yielding valuable information regarding many of the forts established by the Spanish in the 18th century.

Gilmore served in several elected positions and received numerous honors during her lifetime. She served as president of the TAS in 1982–1983, and of the Council of Texas Archeologists in 1975. In 2003 she became the first recipient of the THC's Curtis D. Tunnell Lifetime Achievement Award, for outstanding service to Texas archaeology. Five years later, on her 40th anniversary of conducting archaeological excavations in Texas, she was honored by Governor Rick Perry with the THC's Governor's Award for Historic Preservation (Figure 3).

The Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) was also a great passion of Gilmore's. In the late 1960s she took part in the initial planning meeting held to discuss forming a society, and subsequently she helped Jelks and others establish the organization (Tunnell 2003:10–11). In 1978 she also served as the SHA's first female president, and in 1995 she was awarded SHA's prestigious J. C. Harrington Award.

Gilmore's passion for archaeology inspired her to become a major philanthropist. She established the Bob and Kathleen Gilmore Endowment for Spanish and French Colonial Archeology in Texas, with the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission. This fund provides grants to researchers who study the archaeology of the colonial period in Texas, thus continuing Gilmore's legacy.

Professional and avocational archaeologists in Texas and across the nation will miss the advice and inspiration of Dr. Kathleen Kirk Gilmore.



FIGURE 3. Kathleen Kirk Gilmore receiving the Governor's Award for Historic Preservation from Texas governor Rick Perry, with Steve Tomka and Larry Oaks looking on. (Photo courtesy of the Texas Historical Commission, 2008.)

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