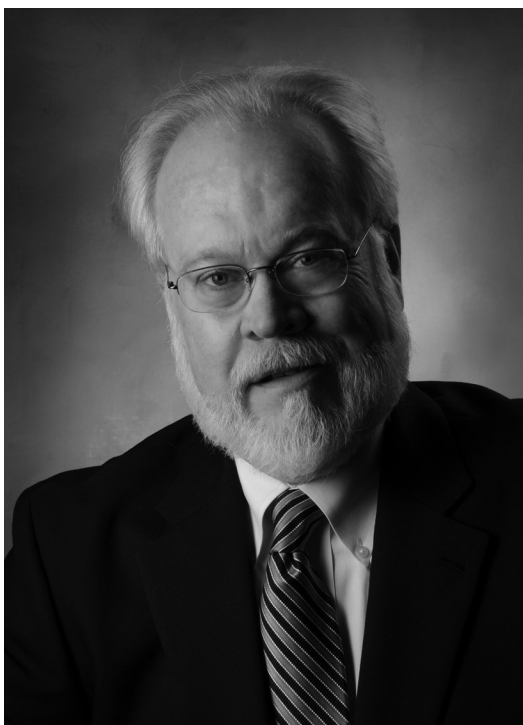


## Carol V. Ruppé Distinguished Service Award



Vergil E. Noble

January of 1976 saw the United States kick off its bicentennial celebration. It was no coincidence that the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) met in Philadelphia that year, a place pivotal in the early history of the nation and where historical archaeology was coming of age under the guidance of scholars such as John Cotter and Robert Schuyler. In 1976, SHA was not yet 10 years old. In attendance at Philadelphia was a young graduate student from Michigan State University by the name of Vergil E. Noble. This was his first SHA conference, and he has not missed one since.

Vergil had joined SHA in 1975 and he soon adopted this organization as his professional home. Through the years he has given freely of his time to support SHA's mission. Dr. Noble is recognized by the SHA by presentation of the Carol V. Ruppé Distinguished Service Award for 2011, "For exceptional and sustained service to the programs, professionalism, and governance of the Society."

The Ruppé Award was established by the SHA in 1988 and is named in honor of Carol V. Ruppé for her many years of service to the organization in creating and managing the bookroom at the annual conference. The award was first presented to Carol Ruppé in 1990 at the conference in Baltimore. The award is given only to SHA members in recognition of their "sustained and truly outstanding service to the Society for Historical Archaeology." This year's award to Dr. Noble is only the fifth Ruppé Award to be presented.

Vergil E. Noble was born in 1952 in Detroit, Michigan, the fourth of four children. His mother, Arliene, was an elementary school teacher, and his father, Vergil, was a crane operator for an

automotive parts supplier. He grew up in the suburbs north of Detroit, and according to his recently published account, his “first memorable glimpse of our profession, at age nine or ten, was obtained while watching the Three Stooges short *We Want Our Mummy* (1939)” (Noble 2007:224). He attended Lincoln High School in Warren (this was about 20 years before vocal artist Eminem graced those same halls), where, impressed with his chemistry teacher, he fancied for himself a career teaching high school chemistry. He set his sights on attending college at Michigan State University (MSU) and was admitted for the fall of 1970. During summer orientation, however, he made a life-changing decision by choosing to study archaeology rather than chemistry.

Although he found that he could not pursue Maya archaeology at MSU as he had hoped, he soon found his way to the MSU museum. There he met Professor Charles E. Cleland, who put him to work as a volunteer in the archaeology lab in the fall of 1972. The basement of the museum was an archaeological incubator for many students, as this was where faculty and graduate students focusing on the eastern United States and historical archaeology had their offices.

In 1973, Vergil accompanied graduate student Pat Martin to the Mill Creek site, a late-British–early American milling complex at the Straits of Mackinac. At Mill Creek, Vergil’s interest in historical archaeology was unleashed. The next summer he worked for graduate student Judy Tordoff on MSU’s project at the 18th-century French colonial site of Fort Ouiatenon, near Lafayette, Indiana. His research interests have ever since included French colonial studies.

Vergil graduated with a B.S. degree with honors in anthropology in spring 1974 and spent the summer and fall working on a variety of archaeological projects in the Great Lakes and upper Midwest. That winter, Vergil decided to apply for graduate study at MSU and was admitted for the fall of 1975.

Vergil’s graduate career lasted from 1975 through 1984. In 1976, I began my graduate studies at MSU and soon found myself sharing an office with Vergil in the basement of the museum. We have been close friends ever since, and our paths have crossed repeatedly in SHA, in the former Society of Professional Archaeologists (SOPA), and in the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA).

In 1976, Vergil returned to Fort Ouiatenon as Judy Tordoff’s field assistant and took over the project in 1977. He worked at this site for three seasons and used this research as the basis for his dissertation. He was awarded an M.A. in 1979 and a Ph.D. in 1983, both in anthropology with a focus in historical archaeology.

His major professor at MSU was Charles Cleland, who instilled in Vergil and many of his other students, myself included, a strong sense of professionalism and service. While completing his doctorate, Vergil held an instructorship with the Department of Anthropology and a research associate position with the MSU museum. Following award of a Ph.D. in 1983, Vergil stayed on at MSU for another year to teach in the anthropology department as a sabbatical replacement for Dr. Cleland and to undertake postdoctoral study in history.

In 1984, Vergil took the position of director of the Midwestern Archaeological Research Center at Illinois State University (ISU) that was open due to the retirement of Ed Jelks. While at ISU, he was also assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Between 1985 and 1987, he served on the board of directors of the Center for French Colonial Studies (he is a founding member of this organization) and as a councilor of the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council (National Register Review Board). In 1985, he received the Research Initiation Award for program development from ISU. In 1987, he received the certificate of merit for “significant contributions to historic preservation” from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

In 1987, Dr. Noble made what he thought would be a brief stop at the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) of the National Park Service (NPS) in Lincoln, Nebraska. This year, however, is Vergil’s 24th at MWAC. His fieldwork there initially focused on cultural resources at parks within the NPS Midwest Region, including work along the Ohio and Erie Canal, a series of homes of U.S. presidents, and fur-trade sites in Arkansas and Minnesota. He currently works in the external National Register/National Historic Landmarks programs, where he prepares nominations, provides technical assistance to stewards, and monitors conditions of listed properties. Notable was his assistance in coordinating Charlotte King’s (University of Maryland) successful nomination of the historic New

Philadelphia town site in Illinois, leading to its designation as a National Historic Landmark in 2009 on the basis of archaeological research significance.

In 1993, Vergil was awarded a special achievement award by the superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley Recreational Area (now National Park), for his research on the Ohio and Erie Canal, and in 1996 the Omaha-Lincoln Federal Executive Association named him employee of the year in the professional/scientific achievement category. In Lincoln, Vergil has also had a long association with the University of Nebraska, where he has served as adjunct professor of anthropology (graduate faculty) since 1987.

The Carol V. Ruppé Distinguished Service Award is presented to Dr. Noble as he attends his 36th consecutive SHA annual meeting. During that time, he has presented 11 papers, co-organized 3 symposia, organized 3 luncheon workshops, served as discussant for 6 symposia, and participated in 5 discussion panels. Since 1979, Vergil has published 9 articles and 11 book reviews in *Historical Archaeology*, and served as coeditor of a thematic issue of the journal. He has published extensively elsewhere as well.

Laudable as his record of attendance and scholarly contribution may be, the SHA is here recognizing Vergil's sustained service that began in 1983 when his name was placed in nomination as a candidate for a seat on the SHA Board of Directors. Although his bid was unsuccessful, he has from that time forward given unselfishly to the organization through service in multiple arenas.

The next year, 1984, he was appointed by *SHA Newsletter* Editor Norman Barka to serve the *SHA Newsletter* as contributing editor for Midwest Current Research. He served in this capacity until 1993, and then between 1994 and 1997 as contributing editor for Great Plains Current Research.

In the early 1990s, Vergil signed on as program coordinator for the SHA Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology that was held in January of 1993 in snowbound Kansas City, Missouri. Vergil and I had been talking of organizing an SHA conference for some time, and finally put together an invitation to bring SHA to Kansas City. I talked the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) into hosting the conference and volunteered to serve as general conference chair. Vergil agreed to serve as program coordinator and terrestrial program chair, although in reality his contribution was as co-chair of the conference. Another KSHS employee, Carolyn Wallingford, served as local arrangements chair. This is remarkable because Vergil and Carolyn worked so well together that they were married in September following the conference.

In 1994, shortly after Kansas City, Vergil assumed additional responsibility with the SHA Membership Committee. He co-chaired this committee for three years. Also in 1994, Vergil broadened his commitment to the SHA publications program when he agreed to serve as memorials editor for *Historical Archaeology*. This garnered him a position on the editorial advisory committee that he has, fortunately, yet to relinquish. As memorials editor, between 1994 and 1997, he worked with authors during what was inevitably the highly emotional process of preparing memorials for departed colleagues and friends. During his tenure, he coordinated preparation of memorials for Reynold J. Ruppé (by Geoffrey A. Clark and Kent G. Lightfoot), Carlyle Shreeve Smith (by Roger T. Grange, Jr.), John H. Rick (by Max Sutherland), Arnold Remington Pilling (by George L. Miller), and Kenneth Earl Kidd (by Susan M. Jamieson).

The 1994 nominations and elections committee again placed Dr. Noble in nomination as a candidate for the SHA Board of Directors. This time he was duly elected and served on the board from 1995 through 1997. During his term on the board, he was appointed to coordinate a major revision of the SHA Procedures Manual, which he completed in 1997.

That same year he was elected to serve as the SHA representative on the SOPA Board of Directors, a position he held through 1998. He had previously served a term as at-large director on the SOPA board between 1991 and 1993, as grievance coordinator between 1995 and 1997, and as chair of the membership and awards committees. In 1995, he received the SOPA Presidential Recognition Award for service to that organization.

His service as SHA representative to the SOPA board was a critically important assignment, as it was during this period that SOPA went through a very difficult internal analysis. This ultimately led to a decision to disband the organization in favor of a new incarnation, the RPA. Of importance,

however, is that this transformation relied on the acceptance of a proposal for the creation of RPA by the board and membership of SOPA, and by the boards of partnering organizations: SHA, the Society for American Archaeology, the American Anthropological Association, and the Archaeological Institute of America; this in itself was no small feat.

I was president of SOPA at that time, and I can personally attest that Vergil's dedication to ethical professional behavior and his precise analytical mind made him a valuable member of the discussion that reinvented SOPA as RPA. His dedication to SHA's interests helped to ensure that the society remained a strong partner in the relationship with RPA. RPA is today succeeding because of the debate and planning that occurred during Vergil's tenure as SHA's representative to the SOPA board during 1997 and 1998.

With the creation of RPA in 1998, the SOPA board went into suspension, and the officers and directors became the transitional board for RPA. Vergil continued to represent the interests of SHA during these important first few years, serving as SHA's appointed representative on the RPA board from 1998 through 2000.

Between 1997 and 2001, Vergil served as reviews editor for *Historical Archaeology*. During a period of explosive growth in publications relevant to the field, Vergil placed books with reviewers and got most of these reviews into the pages of *Historical Archaeology* through the use of his organizational, editorial, and persuasive skills. Vergil edited 202 reviews published in volumes 31 through 35.

The 2000 SHA Nominations and Elections Committee again called Vergil to service as a candidate for the position of president-elect. Vergil's election was confirmed, and he took office at the business meeting at the 2001 SHA conference in Long Beach, California, aboard the *Queen Mary*.

During his term as president-elect, he chaired a search committee for an association management firm for SHA. The society had conducted a previous failed search, and Vergil was tasked with undertaking another. At that time, SHA was being managed largely by volunteers, but with an annual contract with SHA member Michael Rodeffer's firm, Backcountry Archaeological Services, to provide business office services. The move toward a professional management firm was deemed necessary because of the growing administrative demands of the organization that were increasingly taxing its volunteer base. This was, however, uncharted territory for SHA, and the committee worked diligently to put together a scope of services and a review process that resulted in selection of a firm that managed SHA for the next several years.

Testament to Dr. Noble's breadth of influence, in 2001, while serving as SHA President-Elect, he was asked to serve on the steering committee that led the way for the transformation of the long-standing Midwestern Archaeological Conference from an informal but successful regional meeting to a formally incorporated scholarly organization. On the completion of this task, Vergil was asked to chair the nominations committee charged with selecting the first slate of candidates for office in this new organization.

In January 2002, at a time of great national anxiety following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States, Vergil took office as SHA president at the annual meeting in Mobile, Alabama. I joined the board as *SHA Newsletter* editor at the same time. Previously, in 2000, Vergil had put together a proposal for the NPS to host the 2004 SHA conference in St. Louis, for which he would serve as general conference chair. During his year as president, Vergil therefore undertook the normal duties of the president, was involved in general planning for an upcoming SHA conference, and presided over what proved to be a very difficult and ultimately unsuccessful transition to a new professional-association management firm.

As president, Vergil focused attention on defining the proper relationship between the SHA and the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA) as part of a comprehensive analysis and revision of the SHA constitution and bylaws that was also ongoing at that time. The ACUA had long been associated with SHA, which is duly reflected in the annual meeting carrying the name, "Conference on Historical *and* Underwater Archaeology." But in 2002, ACUA was both an independently incorporated not-for-profit organization and constitutionally defined as a standing committee of the SHA. This was at best administratively awkward, and worked as well as it did only because of the good intentions of parties on both sides of this equation.

During his term, Vergil began formal discussions and committee work with the ACUA leadership that ultimately led to the crafting of a memorandum of agreement between SHA and ACUA that recognized the independence of each while codifying a close relationship based on mutual pursuit of a common good. Almost a decade later, this work that was begun in 2002 has resulted in a strong and increasingly symbiotic relationship between SHA and ACUA, which is a tribute to the vision of Dr. Noble and all who have participated along the way.

At the 2003 conference in Providence, Rhode Island, Vergil began his term as immediate past-president and continued his service as the general conference chair for the following conference in St. Louis. Vergil's service as general conference chair during the period leading up to the 2004 meeting was made difficult by the unreliable performance of SHA's management firm. This and a host of other issues led the SHA board to terminate this management contract during the board meeting at the St. Louis conference. Despite questionable support from SHA's contracted management firm, but because of Vergil's leadership and the strength of the society's volunteer base, the St. Louis conference came off without a hitch and is remembered fondly in a long line of excellent SHA conferences. Vergil has since recovered from that year of exhaustion and frustration.

Also in 2003, in his capacity as immediate past-president, Vergil served as chair of the nominations and elections committee and also agreed to chair a committee formed to search for a new editor for *Historical Archaeology*. Retiring editor Ronald L. Michael had overseen production of the journal since 1978, and it had been a very long time since a search for this position had been conducted. Vergil's committee conducted a successful search that resulted in the recommendation of Rebecca Allen for appointment as the next editor of *Historical Archaeology*.

At the close of his term as immediate past-president in January of 2004, Vergil took a bit of a breather, though he continued service on the editorial advisory committee. In 2007, he agreed to chair the committee to search for my replacement as *SHA Newsletter* editor after two terms in this position. This search committee recommended the appointment of Alasdair Brooks, who has brought a welcome global perspective to the *SHA Newsletter* and to the board.

In 2008, Vergil was appointed as SHA parliamentarian upon the retirement of Roderick Sprague from many years of service in this position. Vergil continues to occupy this position which takes advantage of his keen procedural mind, fairness, and thorough knowledge of SHA that has served him and SHA well throughout the past 25 years. I am pleased to report that his appointment as SHA parliamentarian has been renewed for another three years.

Since 1984, Dr. Vergil E. Noble has been involved in constant service to the SHA. During that time, he has helped advance the organization's major programs, especially publications and conferences. He has worked tirelessly to advance the society's standards of ethics and professionalism, as is exemplified by his important service as SHA's representative during the reinvention of SOPA as RPA. He has been steadfast in his dedication to SHA governance, as evident by his two terms on the board of directors (one as president), by his work on committees and task forces, and by his current service as parliamentarian. Best of all, however, is that I can confidently say that Dr. Noble is far from being finished with SHA. For what he has done, and for what he will accomplish for the organization in the future, SHA offers its respectful gratitude.

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