



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

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FREDERICA  
DE LAGUNA

1906-2004

*A Biographical Memoir by*

*WILLIAM W. FITZHUGH*

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## FREDERICA DE LAGUNA

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*October 3, 1906—October 6, 2004*

BY WILLIAM W. FITZHUGH



*Frederica de Laguna*

AMONG THE MANY legendary characters who made the anthropology of the Arctic and Northwest Coast their calling, Frederica de Laguna stands as a towering figure, legendary in her own time. Not only was she highly respected in a field dominated by males; she outclassed virtually all of her northern anthropological colleagues in the scope and sheer volume of her contributions, which embraced archaeology, folklore, ethnohistory, social anthropology, human biology, and linguistics. She did all this, and did it exceedingly well, for 75 years, while also serving as a professor at Bryn Mawr College. Here she spent most of her 98 years training students, building a department and Ph.D. program, conducting

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fieldwork, serving her discipline, and producing an unparalleled body of research. In her early years, just to keep busy and finance her research, she wrote detective stories.

**D**e Laguna, known to friends and colleagues throughout her life as “Freddy,” spent the first two decades of her professional life on comparative work of circumpolar art, on several syntheses of North American archaeology, and on research involving Alaskan archaeology, followed by 50 years of ethnographic study of northern Northwest Coast cultures in southeast Alaska. In this respect her career followed a trajectory similar to that of her teacher and mentor, Franz Boas, whose work began with a search for Eskimo origins and a synthesis of North Pacific cultural history (the Jesup North Pacific Expedition of 1897–1903) and was followed by a similar shift toward documentation of Northwest Coast ethnology and folklore.

But while Boas went on to become the founder of American anthropology and had a stronger theoretical focus, Freddy became the unsurpassed successor of his Northwest Coast legacy. Unlike Boas, she did not write textbooks or engage in high-profile professional debates about culture theory; nor did she become a controversial figure like Boas’ other female students, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. Instead, she created the foundations for the subfield of Alaskan anthropology through her

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voluminous writings and mentoring of a constant stream of professional anthropologists—mostly female—and had a wide circle of Native admirers and collaborators, with the result that she became both a Native and academic “institution.”

Freddy was widely recognized by her peers, serving as vice-president of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) from 1949 to 1950 and as president of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) from 1966 to 1967. In 1975, she and Margaret Mead became the first women in the field of anthropology elected to the National Academy of Sciences. Freddy received the AAA’s Distinguished Service Award, the SAA’s 50th-Anniversary Award in 1986, and the Lucy Wharton Drexel Medal from the University of Pennsylvania in 1999. Her research produced the earliest broad syntheses of Arctic archaeology, and her later works on Northwest Coast ethnology were instant classics. While Freddy’s career was primarily in the classroom, her lifelong affiliation with the University of Pennsylvania and its museum resulted in many contributions to museum anthropology.

Freddy’s wide-ranging accomplishments and eminent professional status are reflected in the outpouring of her obituaries and life reviews. Obituaries by Margalit Fox (2004), Tom Kizzia (2004), Marie-Françoise Guédon (2004), Wallace M. Olson (2005) and Regna Darnell (2005) and an essay by Richard Davis (2006) summarized Freddy’s life and career, while

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Cynthia Ainsworth (2005) and Richard O'Mara (1997) wrote extended profiles of her Alaskan work, quoting extensively from her own field journals. Much of her fieldwork was conducted in collaboration with Catherine McClellan and later with Guédon, and both have provided "insider" commentaries on Freddy's career and fieldwork (McClellan 1988, 1989; Guédon 2004). She assisted by documenting her own life in books and articles (de Laguna 1977, 2000, 2004). In 1985 she conducted taped interviews ("Life History of Frederica de Laguna") with McClellan that were transcribed into a 370-page manuscript on file in the Bryn Mawr College Library and the University of Alaska Archives in Fairbanks. Her subsequent activities were recorded in interviews in 1993 with Charles Mobley. Transcripts of both sets are available at Rasmuson Library in Fairbanks. In 2006 Susan Kaplan published a series of reminiscences, accolades, and evaluations by Freddy's former students and associates in Arctic Anthropology (Kaplan 2006).

During the last years of her life Freddy appointed Guédon as her literary executor, establishing "Frederica de Laguna Northern Books" (<http://www.fredericad-eLaguna.com>) to ensure that her works would remain in print and her unfinished manuscripts would be published and made available, goals that one hopes will be fulfilled. Her professional papers are at the Smithsonian's National Anthropological Archives and have been

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made accessible by a register (Wang 2006). Other of her materials are archived at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

Freddy's success was due to a combination of spectacular intelligence, uncommon dedication, literary skill, and longevity. Her long life and galloping productivity left her initial cohort far behind. While her close friend and colleague, Smithsonian Arctic archaeologist Henry Collins, was known throughout the mid-twentieth century as the "dean" of Arctic archaeology, Freddy enjoyed that status in Alaskan anthropology for her last 30 years. In the years after she retired in 1975 she authored or edited 31 publications, including George Emmons' *The Tlingit Indians*.

In her later years she was so highly respected in the circumpolar community that her rare appearance at gatherings produced the effect of an apparition among younger colleagues. At a reception before the opening of the Russian-American *Crossroads of Continents* exhibit at the Smithsonian in 1988 I asked Sergei Arutiunov and other Russians if they would like to meet Dr. de Laguna, who had come from Bryn Mawr for the event but had long ago given up foreign travel and had never been to Russia. What a surprise for them to discover that the inheritor of their eastern empire's scholarly tradition was no ghost but a diminutive woman with twinkling eyes, a perky upturned nose, and a lively manner, made more

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memorable by her habit of “lecturing” to colleagues as though they were students, with her head tipped back and her eyes closed.

And smart! Freddy remembered everything she had ever read and had no shortage of opinions or fear of expressing them to anyone. For this reason she did not get along with the functionalist Bronislaw Malinowski or the Smithsonian’s autocratic physical anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička (Mason 2006). In matters intellectual, she was a daunting conversationalist.

### **BECOMING A DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR**

Frederica Annis Lopez de Leo de Laguna was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on October 3, 1906, to Grace Mead Andrus and Theodore Lopez de Leo de Laguna, both of whom spent their entire careers teaching philosophy at Bryn Mawr College, where Freddy arrived at the age of one. Her family upbringing and her parents’ sabbaticals in Europe, where she was exposed to the brightest British and Continental scholars, gave her an uncommon education. Freddy excelled as a student, reaping prizes and awards at Thorne School and Bryn Mawr College, where she majored in politics and economics and graduated summa cum laude in 1927. Her graduation prize was a prestigious European fellowship, which she postponed in order to do a year of graduate study in anthropology, linguistics, and folklore at Columbia with Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict.

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Freddy as a student . Photo courtesy of the author. ☰

By this time Freddy had already become intrigued with Eskimos and the Arctic. At the age of 13, after reading Elisha Kent Kane’s *Arctic Explorations* and Vilhjalmur Stefansson’s *The Friendly Arctic*, she wrote to Donald MacMillan, who conducted yearly expeditions

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to Labrador and Greenland on *Schooner Bowdoin*, offering to “chew his boots” if he would invite her to join his Bowdoin College student crew. He declined, but Freddy persisted, and after Columbia she pursued northern studies on her European fellowship, which took her to England, France, and Spain in 1928.

That summer she took part in an American School of Prehistoric Research field school run by archaeologist George Grant McCurdy, who was excavating a Paleolithic rock shelter and touring cave sites in the Dordogne. Freddy was proficient in French, and while exploring the inner recesses of Trois Frères cave she slipped down a chute and discovered herself at the feet of Abbé Breuil, who was busy recording its paintings. “*Bon jour, Monsieur l’Abbé, voici votre élève qui arrive!*” (Here is your student who arrives!), she announced, undaunted (McClellan 1989).

Later, in Paris, she attended lectures given by Breuil and Paul Rivet on Paleolithic art and received instruction in archaeological mapping and artifact illustration. She then returned to England and enrolled at the London School of Economics, thinking she might need to get her Ph.D. there, and she took courses from C. J. Seligman and Malinowski (McClellan 1989; de Laguna 2004; Darnell 2005; Davis 2006).

While these experiences introduced her to archaeological methods and Paleolithic studies, it was Freddy’s attendance at the 1928 Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Copenhagen that set the course

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for the rest of her life. Here she met Kaj Birket-Smith and Therkel Mathiassen, young Danish ethnological and archaeological experts who had just completed their reports from the Fifth Thule Expedition (1921–1924) in the Canadian Arctic. Almost overnight the Danes had become leaders of the new field of “Eskimology” centered at the Danish National Museum, where all the great Greenland and North American Arctic collections were located.

The Fifth Thule expedition had stimulated radical theories of Eskimo origins based on the existence of a common Inuktitut language connecting people from Greenland to Siberia. Birket-Smith held to the Boasian view that Eskimos originated from northern Indian caribou hunters in Keewatin who had emerged from the forest and adapted to the Arctic coast before spreading to Greenland, Labrador, and Alaska with their distinctive Arctic sea–mammal-hunting culture. Mathiassen, on the other hand, saw these ethnological theories as superficial and without historical grounding. His excavations revealed much earlier connections to Alaska for the Eastern Arctic Thule whaling culture. These developments added the complexity of a North American focus to theories, advanced earlier by William Boyd Dawkins (1874) and W. J. Sollas (1911), which called for Eskimo origins from northward-migrating European Paleolithic hunters who then spread east along the circumpolar margin into North America (Fitzhugh 2008, 2010).

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During her six months in Greenland Freddy wrote long letters to her parents describing the excavations, the beautiful Arctic landscapes, Inuit culture, and camp life—experiencing for the first time the exhilaration of fieldwork. “I feel as if I had never really been alive before,” she said.

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The new data of the Fifth Thule expedition created a ferment that pitted younger scholars against the old guard. Freddy wanted a piece of the action in resolving the “Eskimo Problem.”

Her opportunity came when Mathiassen asked Freddy to join his 1929 expedition to West Greenland, exploring the Norse-influenced Inugsuk culture in northern Disco Bay. Their excavations recovered large amounts of Norse objects dating to the 14–15th centuries (Jordan 1984; de Laguna 1977; Mathiassen 1931). To Mathiassen, wood carvings of Norse figures in Inugsuk sites argued for trade and contact before Thule people eventually overran the Greenland Norse settlements in southwest Greenland. (Recent finds of church-bell metal and stained-glass window fragments suggest that Inugsuk people acquired these materials by scavenging abandoned Norse sites.)

During her six months in Greenland Freddy wrote long letters to her parents describing the excavations, the beautiful Arctic landscapes, Inuit culture, and camp life—experiencing for the first time the exhilaration of fieldwork. “I feel as if I had never really been alive before,” she said. After returning she gathered her letter accounts into a manuscript titled *Voyage to Greenland* and sent it to Mathiassen with the dedication: “To Therkel Mathiassen—His comrade on Inugsuk has written this book and sends it to Tikile in memory of a happy summer.” The manuscript remained private until Freddy

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Freddy and Therkel Mathiassen at Inugsuk: “It was a perfect sealskin mitten.”  
Photo courtesy of the author.

published it in 1977, 10 years after Mathiassen’s death, illustrated with her own photographs, sketches, and artifact drawings. In its preface she described how her Greenland odyssey awakened a commitment to anthropology that was so strong “I had to give up the man I loved” (an English engineering student) and found “a voyage into a new life, and for me a new way of looking at the world” (de Laguna 1977).

Freddy’s life catapulted forward after her return from Greenland. She recommenced her studies with Boas at Columbia, taking on a thesis topic he had

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suggested earlier—to evaluate similarities between Paleolithic and Eskimo technology and art. Flush with her Greenland excavations and a career in the offing, she broke her engagement, feeling her profession would be incompatible with a happy marriage. She expressed this view through a character in her detective novel, *The Arrow Points to Murder* (de Laguna 1937), who says: “I wonder why I never married? Too busy, I guess” (Miraglia 2006).

Her topic was important to Boas, who had long sided with the Central Canadian theory of Eskimo origins. Boas had just finished publishing *Primitive Art*, with Northwest Coast art as its core, and was curious what a careful study of Paleolithic and circumpolar art might reveal. His reconstruction of Eskimo history called for a migration into the Bering Strait from the Central Canadian Arctic, thereby creating a wedge of Eskimo peoples who interrupted the arc of similar cultures from Siberia to the Columbia River—a hypothesis he had deduced from his leadership of the Jesup Expedition (Dumond 2003). If his theory was correct, Eskimo culture (and especially its art) should have no historic connection with Paleolithic and early Holocene cultures of northern Europe. Freddy studied all the relevant materials and concluded that circumpolar theorists such as Dawkins, Sollas, and Gutorm Gjessing were wrong; she maintained that the similarities were superficial and that the shared motifs, including circle-dots,

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hatching styles, ticked lines, and tools such as *batons de commandement* (shaft straighteners) and barbed harpoons, could better be explained by independent invention (de Laguna 1932/1933; Westerdahl 2010). Boas’ response after reading her dissertation was a terse, “I thought so,” and nothing more.

Publication, a requirement for a Columbia Ph.D. at that time, came through Freddy’s connections with Mary Swindler at Bryn Mawr, who was editor of the *American Journal of Archaeology* (de Laguna 1932–33). In later years, Freddy dismissed attempts to reinvestigate circumpolar-culture connections and grew impatient with research that was not based on detailed typologies and chronologies. She could be uncompromising on the topic of continuities in northern culture and art and had a running battle with Edmund Carpenter over his and Carl Schuster’s theories of long-term ethnographic and archaeological continuities in time and space (Schuster and Carpenter 1986–88). Her attitude was similar to Abbé Breuil’s comment to Carl Schuster, as reported by Carpenter (2002): “Every time [one] is mixing thing[s] from quite different countries, one will arrive at nothing.”

Freddy’s Danish connections came to the fore again in 1930 when she started collaborating with Birket-Smith (McClellan 1989; Workman 2006), who was eager to compare his Barren Ground Eskimo theory with new data from the Chugach Eskimo at the extreme

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southwestern frontier of the Eskimo cultural world. The project was nearly scuttled when Birket-Smith had to withdraw due to illness. Undaunted, and assisted by her younger brother Wallace, Freddy carried on and began the first of four years of archaeological work in the anthropologically unknown region at the Eskimo-Tlingit boundary in Southeast Alaska. The first project took place in Kachemak Bay. On her way home Freddy stopped to study collections at the National Museum of Canada, where she met Diamond Jenness and learned of her father's death.

In 1931, Wallace and Freddy's mother, Grace, accompanied her to Alaska, and in 1933 Birket-Smith joined the team. Their collaboration resulted in *The Chugach Eskimo* (Birket-Smith 1953), *The Eyak Indians of the Copper River Delta* (Birket-Smith and de Laguna 1938), and *Chugach Prehistory* (de Laguna 1956). Her *Archaeology of Cook Inlet* (de Laguna 1934) appeared in print out of thin air one day when, with Ph.D. but still unemployed, she was cataloguing books for the Bryn Mawr Library for 25 cents an hour and came across her own book. Someone else's manuscript submission had failed to appear, and hers advanced to publication without her knowledge (Workman 2006). In the four years 1930–1933, before Freddy even had a faculty appointment, she had already laid a firm foundation for South Alaskan archaeology and ethnology.

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While waiting for a position to open at Bryn Mawr and preparing her Cook Inlet and Eyak reports, Freddy produced three books for general readers, all laced with anthropological insight (Miraglia 2006). The first, published in 1930 and aimed at young adults, was titled *The Thousand March: Adventures of an American Boy with Garibaldi*; the story was based on G. M. Trevelyan's account of the Italian patriot. Two detective stories followed: *The Arrow Points to Murder* (1937), based on Freddy's knowledge of the University of Pennsylvania Museum; and *Fog on the Mountain* (1938), involving cultural and racial clashes between whites and Natives in South Alaska. She had a gift for the perfect phrase and the well-chosen word, and these skills, honed early in her upbringing in a household of philosophers, made her a superb teacher and exceptional writer. There was one tiny fly in the ointment: she was a poor speller and often carried a small dictionary.

During this period Freddy began an intensive study of northern museum collections, seeking a more rigorous grounding for theories and reconstructions resulting from new research in northern Eurasia and North America. Wissler (1916), Mathiassen (1927), and Collins (1937) had made progress connecting the Thule migration from Alaska to Greenland; but Alaskan Eskimo relationships with Siberia and the Northwest Coast, and the relationships of pre-Thule Sarqaq and Dorset culture in the

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Eastern Arctic (Solberg 1907; Jenness 1925) with Alaska and the Northeast, needed critical evaluation.

**F**reddy's foray into synthesis began with an investigation of North American Eskimo lamps and pots (de Laguna 1940). This study employed techniques she learned on summer digs and travel in the late 1930s with her mother in the American Southwest. Based on the absence of ceramics from the interior and Southeast Alaska she concluded the relatively crude Aleutian ceramic vessels and lamps must have diffused from northeastern Siberia via the Aleutians, giving rise to Eskimo ceramics in western and southern Alaska and possibly to the source of the stone lamps of the Kachemak culture. Later on, Aleut pottery was studied by Quimby (1945), who saw it as a local development from stone vessels, and by Griffin (1960, 1962), who linked it to an Asian and circumpolar distribution but not via the Aleutians. Freddy noted the absence of soapstone lamps in the Alaskan Thule tradition and concluded that Eastern Arctic Thule stone lamps and pots developed from contact with the earlier Dorset culture.

Her first major synthesis grew out of participation in a 1935 boat survey down the Tanana and Yukon Rivers. The project was mostly geological, but Freddy hoped to find evidence of Clovis or other early cultures along this potential migration route into North America. The team built its own flat-bottomed skiffs in Nenana

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with lumber shipped up from Seattle—sturdy crafts, but with almost no freeboard. The early-man aspect of the work failed to materialize, but she gained knowledge of interior Athapaskan groups for the first time (de Laguna 1935, 1936a, b) and collected Ingalik Indian masks for the University Pennsylvania's Museum (de Laguna 1936c). As she gathered comparative material for her Yukon report, the analysis became the fulcrum for a huge comparative monograph, *The Prehistory of Northern North America as Seen from the Yukon* (de Laguna 1947), the first attempt by any scholar to synthesize Arctic and Subarctic archaeology ranging from Japan to northern New England. The project involved an exhaustive survey of collections in the major museums of North America.

Never a fan of Bryn Mawr's and the University of Pennsylvania Museum's classical archaeology campaigns, Freddy was convinced that the best scholarship came from well-focused small-scale research. That kind of practice served her, and early-phase North American archaeology, well. Her method for the Yukon project used detailed distributional studies of carefully defined artifact types to build cultural complexes up from these components, much as Birket-Smith and Alfred Kroeber had done for comparative ethnology and Clark Wissler for Point Barrow harpoons. Reacting against the diffusionist excesses of the day, her analysis required ferreting out independent look-alikes from artifacts or complexes that revealed solid evidence of contact and influence

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between neighboring and more distant cultures. The result was a tour de force, but because its results were largely negative, her monograph (de Laguna 1947) had relatively little impact (other than affirming prior beliefs about the eastward Thule migration and pan-Eastern Arctic Dorset connections). Archaeological evidence was still too spotty, the definition and dating of complexes too loose, and the influence of ethnography too dominant to allow for a revolutionary synthesis. Even today, the cultural history of Northeastern Asia is too fragmentary for convincing cultural reconstructions, except for the last 2,000 years around the Bering Strait.

During these years the complexion of the “Eskimo Problem” changed dramatically. Diamond Jenness (1925) had identified Dorset as a distinct, pre-Thule culture in northern Hudson Bay, but Mathiassen resisted, arguing that because Dorset tools were often found in Thule sites they were a different technological or seasonal “facies” of Thule industry. Collins and others sided with Jenness, and soon a plethora of single-component sites confirmed Dorset as a pre-Thule, non-whaling culture that lacked dogs, bows and arrows, ulus (indigenous knives), and other characteristic Thule features. While it was clear by this time that Thule’s origins lay in Alaska, Dorset was another matter. In an influential symposium (Johnson 1946), Freddy joined with other northeastern experts who were impressed with similarities between Dorset and Northeastern cultures—including

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Hopewellian-Woodland, Brewerton-Lamoka, and other Laurentian Archaic groups (de Laguna 1946)—thereby reopening the old question of Eskimo origins, but at an earlier Paleoeskimo period. The question was: Which way did the influence flow?

Operating on the long-held bias of great antiquity of the Eskimo, Freddy believed Dorset culture had been the donor. A few years later, radiocarbon dating revealed the Archaic groups to be 2,000-3,000 year older than Dorset, prompting her to comment, “My [1946] venture has had the distinction of considerable bibliographic citation, but, it must be admitted, almost invariably for the purpose of refuting its conclusions” (de Laguna 1962). By the 1960s, studies across the Arctic had established Dorset as the latter phase of the Arctic Small Tool tradition, whose origins were in the Siberian Neolithic and Alaska (Irving 1962). De Laguna’s summation of the papers assessing prehistoric cultural relations between the Arctic and Temperate zones of North America—presented at a symposium of the 25th annual meeting of Society for American Archaeology held at Yale—served as a cautionary tale. She said: “No one has seriously tried to explain away all the relevant Eskimo-Indian similarities by invoking coincidence—that is, by postulating independent parallel or convergent developments—which probably did occur in some cases; nor has anyone seriously questioned that there were similarities to be explained.” She went on: “If there is a moral in this it

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is to beware of the latest and most popular assumptions of science, for the very fact of their being in style may prevent us from seeing more reasonable but less fashionable possibilities” (de Laguna 1962).

The period around 1960 was a major turning point in Arctic archaeology. Radiocarbon dating had replaced typological studies for chronology building, and finer chronologies were needed before intelligent comparisons between cultures could be made. The creation of national science-funding programs, the post-World-War-II opening up of northern air-transport routes, and the establishment of military bases and distant-early warning stations across the Arctic were making it much easier to conduct archaeology there, plus a wave of new researchers was entering the field (Campbell 1962). For the first time since the 1920s, the Soviet Union lowered its frontiers and some of its researchers were allowed to attend international meetings in Europe and the United States. The 1964 International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, held in Moscow, brought Western scholars (but not de Laguna) into direct contact with a large contingent of Soviet researchers, including many northern specialists.

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#### LATER LIFE: EDITING AND ACCOLADES

**D**uring the 1960s to 1980s Freddy was heavily engaged in building the anthropology program at Bryn Mawr and in serving professional organizations. Over the years she developed close relationships with Diamond Jenness and especially with Henry Collins, with whom she consulted closely, regularly sharing manuscripts and discussing developments. In 1973 she participated with Collins, Edmund Carpenter, and Peter Stone in the National Gallery of Art’s exhibition *The Far North: 2000 Years of American Eskimo and Indian Art* (Collins et al. 1973). Her Yakutat Bay archaeology report was published in 1964, and her epic *Mount Saint Elias* monograph, on which she had worked for a decade, appeared in 1972. Freddy wrote on Ahtna, Eyak, and Tlingit ethnology in the Smithsonian’s *Handbook of North American Indians* (de Laguna 1990a, 1990b) and participated in the Smithsonian’s *Crossroads of Continents* exhibition catalog (de Laguna 1988). In the 1990s (her 80s!) she took on the huge task of editing the journals of George Thornton Emmons, a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, whose observations on the Tlingit and ethnological collections from in the 1880–90s were the most extensive early records on the Tlingit and Tahltan (de Laguna 1991). In addition to a voluminous professional correspondence, Freddy was an assiduous reviewer of books and monographs. Spanning 70 years, her reviews, tempered by insight and *le bon mot*, advanced the

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discipline beyond the works she reviewed, for by this time she had become a professional bellwether for the Arctic and Subarctic community.

In 1986 Freddy received an honor that to her was as prestigious as her induction into the National Academy of Sciences. In 1954, at the conclusion of her five years of field work with the Yakutat Tlingit, she was adopted as a member of their Gineix Kwaan and Luknaxadi Raven Moiety clans. At that time Freddy received her Tlingit name, Kuxaankutaan, from Katy Dixon, and for that occasion she composed a song to honor her Tlingit friends. In 1986 she was invited back to take part in Sharon Goodwin's memorial potlatch and was offered the opportunity to sing her song as part of her clan's "payoff" to the opposite Wolf Moiety. Excited but nervous, she offered, in Tlingit, *Kuxaankutaan's Song* to the tune of the song of her favorite bird, the golden-crowned sparrow. A Tlingit/English translation is published in *Arctic Anthropology* (Shaa and Ramos 2006).

The corpus of material that appeared in her later years and after her death reveals much about Freddy's personal and professional contributions and impact. In addition to those accounts noted above, *Arctic Anthropology*—written by her students, colleagues, and Native friends—described her life at Bryn Mawr, reunions with villages in Alaska where she worked, commentaries, and research she stimulated (Kaplan 2006).

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## BROADER CONTRIBUTIONS

**F**reddy's life spanned the era that began with the first application of archaeology as a method of exploring cultural history and closed with the advent of repatriation that saw profound changes in the conduct of anthropological research. As she began her career, the question of Eskimo origins had been debated since Boas' Jesup Expedition but had become more complicated after the conflicting results of the Danish Fifth Thule Expedition (1921–24). By the 1930s, the problem of Eskimo origins had broadened into questions of Eskimo-like circumpolar cultures and Dorset culture relationships. Freddy launched herself into these controversies by conducting a detailed study of Eskimo art and its similarities to Paleolithic art. This and her later syntheses introduced healthy skepticism to a field rife with diffusion theory. Turning from grand schemes to detailed field studies, she began archeological studies in the archaeologically unknown area of southeast Alaska but soon found her interests shifting to ethnology and ethnohistory of the Tlingit and Eyak, where she spent the rest of her professional life. Freddy's bibliography reads like a history of Arctic anthropology, so widely do her writings address issues that have been central to northern scholars throughout the past century.

De Laguna is probably the last American scholar to live into the twentieth century as the quintessential four-field Boasian anthropologist. As the discipline struggles

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to keep its anthropological core, cultural integration is often being done by teams of specialists, making the Boasian generalist a rare if not obsolete phenomenon. Freddy recognized this in her 1967 presidential address, citing anthropology as the “only discipline that offers a conceptual schema for the whole context of human experience” (de Laguna 1968). Her publications rarely included physical anthropology, but throughout her life she regularly made contributions to folklore, ethnology, linguistics, and archaeology. Even though she abandoned archaeological fieldwork in mid-career, prehistory was an important component of her masterwork, *Under Mount Saint Elias* (de Laguna 1972). This synthesis of the Yakutat Tlingit has been described as “unmatched by any other study of North American natives ... [I]t shows the patterning of Yakutat Tlingit culture through time and reveals the interplay of the Tlingit worldview and the individual” (McClellan 1988). Freddy considered it her most important work, binding together “human behavior, values, patterns, and style, and incorporating human history” (McClellan 1988). *Under Mount Saint Elias* is recognized as a cultural bible by the Tlingit themselves.

Freddy has said, perhaps wryly, that her most important archaeological contributions were pointing out that Dorset “boot-creasers” were really burins and that stone lamps with human effigies would eventually be assigned to Kachemak Bay III culture; but there is



Freddy returns to Inugsuk, 1979. (Photo by Jørgen Geisler, National Anthropological Archives 7–16) ☹

much more to her archaeology than that. Her paper on the Eskimo in northeastern archaeology (de Laguna 1946) demonstrated in minute detail the similarities and differences between Thule and Dorset and Northeastern Archaic cultures. Using similar method of detailed comparisons, her *Prehistory of Northern North America as Seen from the Yukon* (de Laguna 1947) synthesized northern prehistory from Japan to New England and everything

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in between. Her analysis was analytically more advanced than competing syntheses such as Gutorm Gjessing's *Circumpolar Stone Age* (Gjessing 1944) and Leroi-Gourhan's *Archéologie du Pacifique Nord* (Leroi-Gourhan 1947). Her trait lists packaged in outdated Danish ethnological paradigms (e.g., Snowshoe Culture Stratum, Ice Hunting Stratum) were outmoded, but the elements grouped into a new "North Pacific Cultural Continuum" concept were innovative. Freddy never properly developed this idea, which presaged the famous "interaction sphere" concept proposed for the Hopewellian trade system (Caldwell 1964). Later this concept became the thesis for the Smithsonian's *Crossroads of Continents* research and exhibition program (Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988; Fitzhugh and Chaussonnet 1994) and for subsequent studies of culture contacts and development along the North Pacific rim.

The value of syntheses is often short-lived, and Freddy's are no exception, being rarely cited today. For this reason her Chugach, Yakutat, and Angoon monographs are her most enduring archaeological contributions. As Bowers and Moss (2006) have stated:

De Laguna's major publications on the archaeology, ethnography, and history of Angoon and Yakutat represent the best of the Boasian approach, integrating all subfields of anthropology. They epitomize de Laguna's dedication to "anthropology as a way of life." To say that these books are "classics" is an

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understatement. They are both comprehensive and detailed in nearly every imaginable observation about culture: archaeology, history, land use, subsistence, mythology and religion, music and art, the social world, and material culture. [They] convey Tlingit intellectual traditions and Tlingit historiography in ways that will be forever valuable to a wide range of communities.

These publications established a solid core of Tlingit cultural history that has well served researchers up to the present. Freddy's interest in environment and ecological connections—a Kroeberian legacy (after ethnologist Alfred Kroeber)—would later be described as an early version of TEK, or traditional ecological knowledge (Bowers and Moss 2006). Today Freddy's anthropological approach to cultural reconstruction needs to be emphasized more than ever, given the tendency for archaeology to become so scientific as to be understandable only to professional audiences. Whether her model of reporting can be sustained by researchers being trained today is an open question.

While Freddy was a pioneer in knowledge repatriation, she was less enamored of its application to material culture and skeletal remains. She was saddened by the politics that sometimes estranged native groups, anthropologists, and museums, and was never a fan of political correctness; she maintained that anthropologists have a moral responsibility to "be objective" and stand partly outside the cultures they study. An obituary opined that

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Freddy and Graham Rowley at the Dartmouth College Eastern Arctic Elders Conference in 1993.   
(photo by William Fitzhugh)

she had “limited patience with the sensitivities of the multicultural era” (Fox 2004) but understood the sentiment behind it. She once commented to a reporter, “They’ve been so abused, so many treaties broken, they want to get back at the white man. As to skeletons, I understand why Indians want them back, but many of their ancestors believe the spirit would leave the bones and therefore it would not matter” (O’Mara 1997).

These are the views of an earlier generation. Fortunately, Freddy’s brand of repatriation has been established by the literature she created after interviewing elders whose traditional knowledge and songs were

being lost by attrition. Meeting with one of her Tlingit informants in Yakutat in 1996, when the documentary about Freddy’s work there was being filmed, tribal elder Marie Abraham commented, “There are few people in her profession that have made such an impression with the people she wrote about. She became part of us. She became our Grandma. We love you. We thank you for all the gifts you have given us. You’ve given us the greatest gift that anybody could give a culture. You saved the songs. You gave them back to us” (Spann 2006).

While much of de Freddy’s legacy is as robust as the Chugach Eskimo, the Yakutat Tlingit, and the Ahtna Athapascan peoples—whose history, culture, and beliefs she and her colleagues documented so thoroughly—she is also remembered for discovering a small group of Eyak Indians located on the Copper River at the Eskimo-Indian border in Southeast Alaska. Her work here in 1933 with Birket-Smith, and with Norman Reynolds and Michael Krauss in later years, recorded the stories, traditions, and language of this dying culture (Birket-Smith and de Laguna 1938; Krauss 1964, 2006), whose last speaker, Marie Smith Jones, passed away in 2008. This experience was instructive regarding the mutability of cultures, culture areas, and boundaries, which many anthropologists had come to see as fixed. As noted by O’Mara, “the Eyak are a people assailed by circumstance: they have been absorbed by the Tlingit, despoiled by whites, and ravaged by

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smallpox. Their fate crystallized for Freddy the process by which native cultures go extinct. She watched their decline over decades, and even made attempts to save their language.” The passing of one of the remaining speakers, Anna Nelson Harry, occasioned Freddy to contribute a poem to Krauss’s memorial to Anna in which she links Anna’s and the Eyak’s fate with her own (Krauss 1982):

### **On Copper River Flats**

I smell the salty stench of drying seaweed  
 My bare toes clutch cold wetness reluctant still  
 Stretching the haze of miles  
 My tracks dissolve in dimpled pools  
 As the lines once gouged by your canoes  
 Dragged by brown arms  
 Returning potlatch proud  
 The rising tide to be effaced.

While Freddy’s footprints are gone, it is certain that her legacy—and, thanks to her, those of the people and cultures she studied—will not suffer the same fate. Her credo is best summed up at the end of her presidential address in 1967:

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It is not given to us, or at least to most of us, to be a Boas or a Kroeber who can work at first hand in all branches of our discipline. But we can share their vision and stand on the mountaintop, surveying all the vast world laid out below. We can have a hand in drawing the map, knowing that it will never be completed, and that we as individuals may never travel more than a few leagues across it. Still we shall know where we are, and where the blank spaces lie, if we take our bearings on a common beacon, and speak to each other as we pass. Because we have not sought the safety of familiar well-buoyed waters, but claim a wide universe for our domain, we shall always, I fondly hope, find ourselves sailing toward continents of spice and treasure. We will be asking questions of import, for which there are no certain answers. (de Laguna 1968).

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