

HISTORY TEACHER ADOPTS ARCHAEOLOGY

[Editor's Note: Martha Williams has taught social studies (primarily American history) for the past 26 years at Marshall High School in the Fairfax County Public School System, Virginia. Since 1973 she has taught several classes in anthropology and has conducted a summer field school. Martha was a participant in the George Washington University/Smithsonian Institution Anthropology for Teachers Program in 1979-80. Anthro.Notes editor JoAnne Lanouette interviewed her former student to discover how one high school teacher brought anthropology into her life, and how she continues to keep it alive.]

Q: How did you become interested in anthropology?

A: I attended a small liberal arts college near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I was training myself to be a scientific translator with a double major in biology and languages and a minor in history. My undergraduate training gave me--and I tell my students to remember to look for this--individual attention, small classes, and a sound liberal arts approach that encouraged intellectual flexibility. A compartmentalized view did not exist, only an interdisciplinary view. That view made me open to anthropology.

Even though I had been teaching American History for about nine years, I jumped at a brochure that crossed my desk in 1972 promoting an Archeology for Teachers Summer Program at Williamsburg.

I was one of the lucky 25 teachers selected. We were given free lodging and \$100 a week. Ivor Noel Hume, Research Archeologist for Colonial Williamsburg until this year, taught the course. The first week Hurricane

Agnes poured rain on Williamsburg while we sat cooped up in a room watching slide after slide of Hume's collection of historic artifacts. At that moment, I wasn't at all sure anthropology was for me. But then we spent the next two weeks with lectures on restoration and architecture and a dig excavating the public mental hospital that was built around 1770. I was hooked. After the program ended I drove back and forth to Williamsburg two days every week for the rest of the summer. That four hour round trip was testimony to how much I loved it.

Q: How did you keep your love alive?

A: Fortuitously, early in 1973, an archeologist at Fort Belvoir called the Fairfax County social studies curriculum supervisor to ask his help in finding students and teachers interested in helping with a dig at Belvoir Plantation. I grabbed at the chance, along with another Fairfax County teacher, Jack Hiller, and began working with students on the site during the spring of 1973.

Q: How did you get students interested in archeology?

A: With the Belvoir archeologist's support, Jack and I started in the summer of 1973 a Summer Field School for Fairfax County high school students. We've been running it almost every summer with a minimum of 20 students. It is a six-week program sponsored by the Fairfax County School System. We try to have as much hands-on experience as possible. The first three years we were at the Belvoir Plantation. Since then we have done salvage work at Sully Planation in Fairfax and three years of excavation at an 18th century site at the beltway and Route 50, which has now been paved over. For the field school, we rely on Deetz's In Small Things Forgotten and Invitation to Archeology for texts. We also have the students spend a day in the judicial archives in Fairfax

County. We have developed a comparative exercise on what is a house and what does it reveal about the inhabitants' lifestyle for visits to Woodlawn Plantation, Turkey Run Farm, and other historic sites. The last couple of years we have done more and more survey work rather than full excavations. We find that testing a site by excavating one foot by one foot squares works better for students--quicker results and more manageable projects.

Q: Did you receive administrative support?

A: Yes. You must remember that in 1973 an open milieu existed for educational experimentation. The curriculum supervisor was a key supporter. Any school system is concerned about its public image. This program was not only innovative but also benefitted the community by giving it a sense of its own history.

Q: How do you manage the logging, studying, and analysis of the artifacts you find during the summer excavations?

A: The County set up a lab in 1978. The lab is commonly known as the James Lee Center and is funded by the Fairfax County Office of Comprehensive Planning. It provides paraprofessional training sessions and guides our field school. In 1978, citizen pressure from the History Commission prompted the county to hire one professional archeologist to be on the staff at the Center; later another archeologist was hired. Students come in during the week and one Saturday to work in the lab. I even give my American history students extra credit for coming in to work.

Q: Have you found anything in the "trash" you have been picking through?

A: Yes, I was surprised to find this old 18th century metal button. You can see that it once was a brass button by the signs of corrosion (tarnish) on the back. See, even trash can be exciting!

Q: How have you been able to offer an anthropology course in a small high school?

A: As far as I know Marshall is the only high school in Fairfax that offers a one semester course in anthropology. That gives Marshall a uniqueness--important in such a large school system--and the administration welcomes it. Interestingly, the administration decided on their own to offer a year-long course next year--one semester of anthropology and one semester of archeology.

Q: How do you stay connected to other archeologists?

A: I belong to the Archeological Society of Virginia, an amateur society. Most states have these

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societies, which are good resources for teachers. I am on the state board of directors and the head of the Education Committee, born, at my urging, two years ago. My goal is to develop a list of archeology resources in Virginia and distribute it to every school system in the state.

I also belong to the Society for Historical Archeology, a professional society. Last year I attended their convention in Savannah, Georgia and met several other professionals interested in archeology education. Thinking the society should do more to promote the teaching of archeology in high schools, I put a note on the bulletin board asking for names of those interested in archeology and education. From that list of 15 names, I am planning an Archeology and Education program of eight papers for the 1989 Baltimore meeting. This society now has an Educational Subcommittee.

Q: From your perspective does a serious split exist between amateur and professional archeologists?

A: Yes and no. I see the gap between professional and amateur archeologists narrowing somewhat since less money is available and the amount of money used needs justification. Archeologists need public support for labor and for defense of their activities. They simply cannot shut themselves off from the public.

In my opinion, the gap continues because professional archeologists and anthropologists have been reluctant to promote the teaching of anthropology in the pre-college years. We have such a sad scarcity of materials for teaching archeology or anthropology in schools. While professional anthropologists may disparage movies such as "Crocodile Dundee" and "The Gods Must be Crazy," these films have value for teachers trying to find vehicles for making their students think about anthropology.

Q: Don't you ever get bored?

A: I recently earned my second M.A. in history, in a program in applied history at George Mason University, with specialized courses in archives management, preservation, and museum studies. In lieu of a thesis, I helped develop a Culture Resources Management Plan for Fairfax County. I have never lost my fascination with archeology. I enjoy trying to make sense of it. I love puzzles, and digs are giant puzzles. I hope my students learn to love these puzzles as much as I have.