

TALES OF THE NORTH: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM BATES WORKMAN

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When the term “scholar” was coined, someone had Bill Workman in mind. “Uncle” Bill to many of us who were lucky enough to be his students or to have had his presence on our graduate committees, Dr. Workman is the embodiment of a quintessential scholar—a person with an encyclopedic knowledge of world prehistory and ethnography, a keen intellect, and a deft way of going directly to the heart of any matter with aplomb, wit, and humor. We first met Bill in 1971 on our first field experience in

Alaska, to excavate with our professors, William Laughlin and Jean Aigner, in the Aleutian Islands. Since then, Bill has been a mentor, a colleague, a supporter, and most of all, a friend. From a personal viewpoint (DRY), my own field experiences with Bill—at the Ringling Site near Gulkana, Alaska in the 1970s, at the Yukon Island Fox Farm site in Kachemak Bay in the 1980s, and at nearby Port Graham in the 1990s—were among my most pleasurable field experiences. I was honored to have studied the archaeofaunal



William (Bill) Workman excavating at the Early Contact Village site, Kenai Fjords National Park, in August 2003 (see Crowell et al., this volume). Photo by Aron Crowell.

remains from his excavations on Chugachik (Indian) Island as well as from the Fox Farm site and Port Graham (the last of which is still unpublished). It was as a result of Bill's connections with Hiroaki and Atsuko Okada that I (DRY) was able to excavate with them at the Hot Springs Site at Port Moller on the Alaska Peninsula, another life-changing field experience. I have also learned from Bill the pleasures to be found in alternating work on the rainy coast, where things preserve well, and the dry interior, where one has real summer.

The intellectual exchanges that we have had with Bill—in the hallways at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), in the field, and at meetings—were, and are, incredibly stimulating experiences. Perhaps we enjoyed these discussions so much because we almost always found ourselves in agreement with Bill's positions on various issues. Also, it has always been wonderful to be regaled by Bill's previous field experiences and tales of the "Wisconsin mafia"—the group of Arctic archaeologists that were originally students at the University of Wisconsin under Chester Chard, Bill Laughlin, and Hansjürgen Müller-Beck—a group whose diaspora brought circumpolar studies to a number of U.S., Canadian, and Japanese universities and other institutions. Bill has often said that those who lust for leadership are probably the least desirable candidates, and so it was that though he sometimes took over the role with reluctance, his three stints of service as chair of the Department of Anthropology at UAA were always exemplary. Although he retired from the department in 2005, it is fortunate for us that he is willing to continue to spend time as professor emeritus at UAA, participating on graduate committees and sharing his expertise that extends into so many areas.

As befits a true scholar, William Bates Workman has led an academic life, but one that has often enabled him to spend summers in a tent, in either a rainy and windy or a mosquito-choked environment. Growing up in Madison, Wisconsin, he attended the university there, where he obtained his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees. He was a "faculty brat" whose father was a professor of German there. Bill also had a facility for languages, learning not only German but Russian, which was to prove valuable in later circumpolar research. Before he graduated from UW, he not only met and married Karen Wood, but, through the connections of his professors, was able to participate in expeditions to Kodiak Island (with fellow student and Kodiak native Donald Clark), and to undertake his MA research on Chirikof Island and his PhD research in the

southern Yukon. Each of these resulted in a published *magnum opus* that made a major contribution to the northern archaeological literature. Other connections with former fellow graduate students from Japan resulted in multiple visits there to participate in conferences and to work on joint publications with these colleagues.

After leaving UW, Bill obtained two academic positions in Anchorage, Alaska, first at Alaska Methodist University (now Alaska Pacific University), and second (after the near-bankruptcy of AMU) at the University of Alaska Anchorage. While at UAA, Bill served as department chair as well as on various promotion and tenure committees, obtained (with his colleague Jack Lobdell) NSF grants to support his research in Kachemak Bay, and mentored numerous undergraduate and graduate students. While in Anchorage, he contributed in many ways to the Alaska Anthropological Association, serving as president, board member, and contributor to numerous committees. Bill has been constantly supportive of the work of others, reviewing innumerable works of students and colleagues alike. His gift for placing the works of others into incisive, synthetic treatments is part of what has always made, and continues to make, Bill's professional writings so noteworthy and his talks such a pleasure to listen to. In addition, for 30 years Bill and Karen have opened their house to visiting scholars from all of the continents of the world, especially from Canada, Russia, and Japan. Bill and Karen have also traveled several times to Japan, to interact with colleagues there; to Europe, to participate in professional symposia in Scandinavia and more recently to review European circumpolar research at meetings in France; and to Canada, particularly to work at the National Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, home to several colleagues and friends.

During the course of his long career, Bill's professional interests have fallen into a number of areas. His early work on Kodiak and Chirikof islands, and later work in Kachemak Bay, gave him a deep, abiding interest in the topic of maritime adaptations, which has extended throughout the circumpolar region and to most of the rest of the world. His fieldwork in the Stikine Valley of north-west British Columbia gave him some perspective on the Pacific Northwest Coast in addition to his previous expertise on southern Alaska. His PhD work in the southern Yukon at the Aishihik and Canyon Creek sites, and later work with Japanese colleagues at the Gerstle River site in east-central Alaska, gave him an interest in late Pleistocene and early Holocene archaeology of Beringia, an inter-

est that was reflected in his paper in the 1980 “Ice-free Corridor”-theme conference of the American Quaternary Association in Edmonton, Alberta (published in the now-defunct *Canadian Journal of Anthropology* in 1982), and in an excellent recent review of the “coastal migration” hypothesis prepared for *American Antiquity*.

This same work in the Yukon, as well as later work at the Ringling Site near Gakona village, gave Bill an interest in the ethnography and ethnohistory of arctic and especially Athabascan people, which was one of his favorite subjects in the classroom. His interest in, and connections with, Athabascan people were reflected in the potlatch at Aishihik to which he and Karen were invited in the summer of 2007, 40 years after their initial fieldwork there. In the paper immediately following this introduction, Karen reflects on many of these themes in her discussion of her work with Bill and their “Early Days in Anchorage.”

All of these interests are reflected in the bibliography of Bill’s major works that we have compiled here (Veltre and Yesner, this volume). Unfortunately, we have not been able to obtain a list of the numerous presentations that Bill has made to professional organizations, such as the Alaska Anthropological Association and the Society for American Archaeology. However, this exhaustive listing of his published works does reflect the great breadth and diversity of his professional contributions.

Bill’s wide-ranging interests are also reflected in the papers that are presented here in his honor. These have been divided into three sections, each roughly organized by time and space. Part I of the volume deals with papers concerning the prehistory and paleoecology of interior Alaska, the Yukon, and the Northwest Coast. Charles Schweger, one of Bill’s early colleagues from the University of Alberta, leads off this section with a discussion of U.S. and Canadian perspectives on the paleoecology of Beringia. His deconstruction of the ideological (as well as political) border between the U.S. and Canada demonstrates the difference in perspectives that has led to conflicting interpretations of Beringian paleoenvironments. This paper represents the first of four contributions by Canadian colleagues who have been important to Bill in his career. It also helps to set the background for the next several papers that deal with more ancient human settlement in north-west North America. The following paper, by Kathryn Krasinski and David R. Yesner, deals with site structure at the Broken Mammoth site, arguably one of the more important of the early sites in interior Alaska, largely because of its well-preserved evidence of faunal remains, or-

ganic tools, and features such as hearths containing large amounts of artifactual debris as well as animal bones. We use similar spatial analytical techniques as those that have been commonly used on Upper Paleolithic European sites to analyze the former activities on this site by some of the earliest colonists in Eastern Beringia, and conclude from the distribution of hearths, fauna, and debitage that they initially occupied the area more sporadically but later (by 10,500 radiocarbon years ago) established a semipermanent base camp there.

Assuming that these early eastern Beringians represent the earliest colonists of the New World, how did they move south from this region? This is the theme addressed by Roy Carlson, professor emeritus from Simon Fraser University, in his discussion of the Northwest Coast as a “high road or hindrance” for human adaptations and potential southward migration. Carlson presents, in a manner very typical of his professional contributions, a highly balanced synthesis of the role of the Northwest Coast as a human habitat during the Pleistocene–Holocene transition. In doing so, he effectively relates the earliest archaeological cultures of the Northwest Coast to those of Beringia to the north. His paper offers convincing evidence that hypotheses of both coastal and interior migration south from Alaska should continue to be pursued. Following this, in a paper that covers the same geographical area as the previous two contributions, physical anthropologists Richard Scott and Christy Turner (a former classmate of Bill’s at the University of Wisconsin) consider the relationship between Na-Dené and “Greater Northwest Coast” peoples as seen from the perspective of both ancient human skeletal remains (especially teeth) and modern nuclear genes. The Na-Dené construct, of course, includes the linguistically related Athabascan and Tlingit groups; the relationship of Haida peoples to these groups has been suggested but is hotly debated, but other contemporary Northwest Coast groups belong to the “Amerind” construct which is not linguistically affiliated. Scott and Turner conclude that the demonstration of intermediate values in both dental and genetic features between Na-Dené and Greater Northwest Coast Indians is a byproduct of common descent and gene flow (hybridization).

The other papers in this section deal with the same region, but focus on later time periods. Charles Holmes, in his synthetic paper on the “Taiga Period,” deals with the Holocene period that postdates the earliest colonists, and is associated with the reforestation of interior Alaska and the adjacent Yukon by spruce, birch, and alder. Holmes

deals with the thorny problem of the mid-Holocene assemblages of the interior forest, often loosely placed under the rubric of the “Northern Archaic,” with the type-diagnostic artifact being the side-notched projectile point. The association of the Northern Archaic with microblade industries that predate notched points and are associated with them in roughly 50% of Northern Archaic sites, invites a range of interpretations involving ethnicity and functionality to explain these associations. By subdividing the Holocene “Taiga Period” into three sub-periods, Holmes is able to demonstrate (1) the temporal gap between early and mid-Holocene industries, suggesting abandonment of the interior (during a period in which the southern Alaskan coast is first colonized); (2) the gradual establishment of the Northern Archaic tradition, congruent with the establishment of the boreal forest itself; (3) the amalgamation of industries, suggesting the absorption of pre-existing microblade-using peoples by northward-moving notched point-using (Archaic) peoples; (4) the probable influence of external Eskimo-related cultures on these processes; (5) the re-emergence of microblade industries in the Late Taiga period; and (6) the disappearance of the Taiga Period with the establishment of the late prehistoric “Athabaskan Tradition” clearly related to contemporary peoples. Although correlates in the way of volcanic eruptions and vegetational changes are sought to explain many of these transitions, there is clearly much work to be done, as Holmes points out.

Robert Ackerman, professor emeritus at Washington State University and another early colleague of Bill, expands consideration of the late Holocene period for the region of interior southwestern Alaska north of the Alaska Range, particularly the Lone and Farewell Mountain region. Ackerman touches on many of the same themes treated by Holmes, including the amalgamation of microblade and notched point industries and the relationship of that process to contemporaneous Eskimo cultures on the coast. He notes, however, that microblade industries are absent in that region after 3,000 years ago, suggesting both the regional nature of these technological trends, and their possible linkage to differences in subsistence that we are now just beginning to understand.

Some additional light is shed on the technological variability associated with late prehistoric artifact assemblages of interior Alaska and the Yukon in the following paper by Jacques Cinq-Mars and Raymond Le Blanc. Exhausted ground stone adzes or axes are occasionally found in such assemblages, and while they are usually considered to have

been tree-felling tools, Cinq-Mars and Le Blanc suggest on the basis of experimental evidence that they may have been used primarily for smaller-scale woodworking (e.g., delimbing trees or producing snowshoe frames) or animal butchery. Instead, their experiments show that antler wedges may have performed the function of tree-felling, producing the “culturally-modified trees” that are prevalent in the late prehistoric period.

The following paper by Diane Hanson of the University of Alaska Anchorage presents the results of her excavations that, 20 years later, picked up where Bill had left off in his 1970s work at the Ringling Site. Her detailed faunal analyses supplement earlier work by Jack Lobdell, and demonstrate that hare could be (at least numerically) important in regional Athabaskan subsistence, a trend which I (DRY) have also found on the Kenai Peninsula. Along with recent work by Kory Cooper, she expands on some of Bill’s earlier work on copper artifacts in the late prehistoric period, suggesting both local manufacture and the possibility of trade networks. Finally, Phyllis Fast of UAA also contributes to our understanding of the late prehistoric period in the interior of Alaska and the Yukon through the use of oral narratives to supplement the archaeological record. In doing so, she is able to use effectively a range of Athabaskan oral traditions, on both direct and metaphorical levels, to support Bill’s hypothesis linking the so-called “White River Ash” produced by a cataclysmic volcanic eruption 1400 years ago to the equally massive emigration of peoples from the region. In doing so, Fast places emphasis on the coincidence in timing of this event with the onset of the late prehistoric Athabaskan Tradition (as discussed by Holmes), as well as the subsequent appearance of possible Athabaskan-related assemblages in the southern boreal forest and northwest Plains as recorded recently by Jack Ives and others.

Part II of the volume treats Bill’s interests in the prehistory of southcentral and southwestern Alaska. I (DWV) begin this section by presenting new data about the work of one of the famous (or is it infamous?) early workers in this region, Aleš Hrdlička of the Smithsonian Institution, as seen through the eyes of Alan May, one of his early assistants. Before his recent death, May donated his diaries to the archives of the University of Alaska Anchorage. These documents have provided new perspectives on Hrdlička’s Aleutian work. Laughlin, of course, was a student of Hrdlička’s, as well as professor to several of the individuals contributing to this volume (Clark, Turner, Yesner, and Veltre).

In “Tales of the North Pacific,” Don Dumond presents what he terms a series of “just-so” stories that attempt to tell the tales of past cultural traditions in southwestern Alaska, and to link them both to other, various contemporary ethnicities, and to major forces of paleoclimatic change. The latter includes eustatic and tectonically-related sea level changes, sea ice conditions and related climatic change, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis, as well as changes in oceanic productivity. With increased knowledge of both the regional archaeological record and its paleoenvironmental backdrop, such “just-so” stories are, in fact, moving from conjecture to testable hypotheses.

The latter is demonstrated in the following two papers. Janet Klein and Peter Zollars add additional elements to the chronology of Kachemak Bay, laying a foundation for better tests of hypotheses of migration and ethnic change, cultural interaction, and abandonment in relation to paleoclimatic change. Herbert Maschner does the same for the western Gulf of Alaska region, presenting in the process important new data on archaeological assemblages from that area. Here he presents not only new chronologies for the lower Alaska Peninsula and adjoining Sanak Island, but also diagnostic artifactual markers for the period around 5000 to 2500 BC in the larger region. These markers, consisting of fishtail endblades and bilaterally-barbed, cross-shaped base harpoons, are found throughout much of the region during this time period, and in fact extend as far north as the Choris Peninsula. Their widespread distribution implies cultural, and probably linguistic, unity throughout this zone. In the case of the cross-shaped base harpoons, I (DRY) have also shown that they are present on the coast of Primorie in the Russian Far East during the same period, implying that the North Pacific world at this time had even more extensive linkages, either through migration or diffusion.

In his following contribution, Don Clark focuses on one tradition within the larger set of southern Alaskan archaeological traditions: that of the Late Kachemak period. This is an important tradition at the end of the Neoglacial period in which intensive salmon fishing seems to have arisen on Kodiak Island, and is followed by site abandonment in Kachemak Bay and by major population transitions on Kodiak Island and the Alaska Peninsula. Clark emphasizes that one way to achieve increased understanding of this important transitional period is through household archaeology, which allows more precise definition of this process by focusing on both intrasite and intersite variability in artifact assemblages, subsistence practices,

and settlement patterns. Here he considers the possible invasion of Norton peoples as an element in this process, one that could certainly be linked to paleoclimate change in the period preceding the Medieval Climatic Optimum.

This section concludes with two papers that reflect Bill’s (and Karen’s) interests in the Dena’ina Athabascan, as well as the Alutiiq/Pacific Eskimo, inhabitants of the Kenai Peninsula area. Douglas Reger and Charles Mobley synthesize a wide range of both published and unpublished data on Dena’ina subsistence practices, based on both artifact and faunal assemblages, to help us understand the use of marine resources by the only known salt-water-adapted Athabascan population. They conclude that Dena’ina people made opportunistic use of a wide range of marine as well as terrestrial resources, using a wide range of distinctive technologies that differ significantly from traditional Eskimo ones. Of particular interest was the Dena’ina use of shellfish for tool-making (including fabrication of ornaments), perhaps more important than their use in subsistence.

Finally, in their paper Alan Boraas and Donita Peter provide an enormous service to archaeologists—not only those working with Dena’ina culture, but on a more universal basis. By demonstrating that the processes of primary and secondary discard of food remains, hearth materials, exhausted tools, tool production waste, and other household refuse is governed by considerations of spirituality connected with proper behavior in relation to important animal and ancestor spirits, Boraas and Peter allow us to breathe life into our study of what is present (or absent) in houses and other village spaces, by connecting these practices with the lives of real people. In doing so, they not only link the present with the past, but show us new axes of archaeological interpretation that were not heretofore possible.

The paper by Boraas and Peter serves as a bridge to the final two papers, placed in a final section on historical archaeology. While the other papers in the volume treat (or attempt to reconstruct elements of) precontact lifeways, these papers address more squarely questions of postcontact cultural change. In the paper by Aron Crowell et al., the emerging record of sites and artifacts from the outer Kenai Peninsula region, particularly when combined with earlier work on Kodiak Island, helps to shed light on the period of early Alutiiq contact with Russian occupants on the southcentral Alaskan coast. Documentary evidence suggests that (for both Dena’ina and Alutiiq people) the Russian contact period was one of relatively light

acculturation compared to the wholesale economic and political transformations of later American occupation. Furthermore, in the vein of “core” v. “periphery” analyses, Crowell et al. argue that the level of acculturation was significantly lighter in the Kenai Peninsula area than on Kodiak Island, and was characterized by “free trade” rather than “forced labor.” An important item in this trade was the manufacture of large numbers of fur and feather parkas, which the Russian colonists had in limited supply, probably by women, which undoubtedly increased their labor substantially. In the final paper in the volume, from farther afield, Richard Scott and Ruth Jolie demonstrate that such large-scale production of clothing in the areas of raw product availability took a toll on the physical well-being of women as well, as can be documented in the human skeletal record.

Taken together, the papers in this volume represent the wide range of interests of both Bill and his colleagues. We present them for Bill in a spirit of thanks for all of the kindnesses and intellectual stimulation that he has visited upon us during what will shortly be five decades of his professional career.

—Anchorage, Alaska, September 1, 2008