James Bennett Griffin
1905–1997

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On May 31, 1997, North American archaeology lost in James B. Griffin one of its most influential practitioners of the past 60 years. He died in Bethesda, Md., at the age of 92 after several years of debilitating illnesses.

Jimmy was born in Atchinson, Kans., on January 12, 1905. Later the family moved first to Denver and then to Oak Park, Ill., where Jimmy would spend his youth. He went to college at the University of Chicago and began his graduate training in anthropology there. In February 1933 he moved to Ann Arbor, Mich., with a graduate fellowship and received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in spring 1936. He had married Ruby Fletcher earlier that year; they would have three sons: John, David, and James.

Griffin's move to the University of Michigan was a fateful event—he would spend his next five decades there, going from a graduate student to full professor and long-time director of the Museum of Anthropology. His research and teaching at Ann Arbor would turn that institution into one of the nation's foremost training grounds for American archaeologists working from the Plains to the Atlantic, and from Canada to Florida, with even a few in Europe and Mesoamerica as well.

He spent the first years of retirement (1976–1984) in Ann Arbor too, but moved to Washington, D.C., in 1984 several years after his wife's death in 1979. He was then associated with the Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian until his death. While in Washington he met and married Mary DeWitt, with whom he spent more than a dozen very happy years.

Jimmy's interest in archaeology was sparked by readings early in his youth and visits to museums. At his Oak Park high school he met Fred Eggan and Wendell Bennett; this friendship would follow a course into graduate school and a professional career in anthropology. The training he received in field archaeology at the University of Chicago was pioneering for the late 1920s. Chicago was at the forefront offering courses in fieldwork, including one by Faye Cooper-Cole. Griffin's first fieldwork was during summer 1929, under the direction of William Krogman, and consisted of a survey of Adams County, Ill., and excavation at the Parker Heights Mound near Quincy, Ill.

By 1930 the Chicago program had become more structured under the guidance of Cole and his assistant, Thorne Deuel. They worked at the Morton Mound in Fulton County, Ill. The field school had illustrious participants sponsored by the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, N.M., including two women in a group of seven. All but one went on to careers in anthropology. Cole lectured to this group on Sundays. Griffin has written that much of what they learned about the sequence of cultures in the region was to be found much later in Cole and Deuel's well-known volume *Rediscovering Illinois* (1937).

By summer 1931, Jimmy had had enough training to conduct his own excavations in the Upper Susquehanna Valley, Pennsylvania, for the Tioga Point Museum. He had to cancel a second season in 1932 because of Depression-caused budget cuts. Instead, he spent that summer writing up the Parker Heights Mound excavations, a manuscript that lay unpublished for 59 years until the Center for American Archaeology in Kampsville published it (1991, The Parker Heights Mound at Quincy, Illinois. Appendix 3 in *The Kuhlman Mound Group and Late Woodland Mortuary Behavior in the Mississippi Valley of West-Central Illinois*, edited by K. Atwell and M. D. Connor, pp. 276–291).

After graduate school Griffin spent six years in Ann Arbor, involved in museum research and publication. In fall 1939 he joined Jim Ford and Phil Phillips to undertake the Lower Mississippi Survey project. Between 1940 and 1946 he spent the better part of three field seasons conducting surface surveys, while Phillips carried out stratigraphic excavations. Next he turned north to the Central Mississippi Survey, and in summer 1950 he directed the project with Al Spaulding's help. The major focus of the project was at Cahokia, but other fieldwork was done in southeast Missouri, and at the Roots site near the Kaskaskia River. Although these activities continued through 1952 and 1953, Griffin was no longer directly involved.

Griffin's subsequent field activities were modest, first tied into a program in Michigan that brought together specialists in an interdisciplinary effort to look at the landscape in terms of geology, climate, and archaeology. In 1963–1964 he supervised excavations at the Norton Mound group of Hopewellian affiliation in Grand Rapids, Mich. A few years later, encouraged by Jim Price, one of his students, he returned to the northern end of the Lower Mississippi Valley with the Powers Phase project in south-

east Missouri (1968–1972). Here successful new field and collection techniques provided Michigan students with an innovative field experience such as the one Griffin had had in Illinois nearly 40 years before.

Griffin's other research activities are much better known through his large number of publications (more than 260) and especially through his three major syntheses: the first in a volume edited by Frederick Johnson (1946, Cultural Change and Continuity in Eastern United States Archaeology. In *Man in Northeastern North America*, edited by F. Johnson, pp. 37–95. Papers No. 3. Robert S. Peabody Foundation for Archaeology, Andover, Mass.), a second in his festschrift for Fay Cooper-Cole (1952, Culture Periods in Eastern United States Archeology. In *Archeology of Eastern United States*, edited by J. B. Griffin, pp. 352–364. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London), and the third in *Science* (1967, Eastern North American Archaeology: A Summary. *Science* 156:175–191). While this last synthesis was one of his most cited publications, it was the first to really bring him to the attention of North American scholars. Indeed, Griffin had worked on this synthesis from 1936 on, giving versions of it at numerous professional meetings. His last formal presentation of this paper was at the 1941 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, and it was only because of World War II that publication of this seminal work was delayed until 1946.

No less important than his research contributions was Griffin's legacy as a teacher. During his years at the University of Michigan, he trained or influenced many generations of archaeologists who went on to distinguished careers of their own. By the 1970s and 1980s, Griffin's students, or students of his students, were teaching at most of the major archaeology graduate programs in North America. Indeed, nowadays it is difficult to find a practicing specialist in Eastern Woodlands prehistory who cannot trace academic "kinship" to Griffin. Those who were fortunate enough to learn from Griffin directly remember him as a helpful and caring teacher, who never left his students hanging. He helped when he could, with complete and direct honesty; reciprocally he expected—and usually got—the hard work and effort that his trust demanded from the students. The fact that he was presented with two festschrifts when he retired is a testament to the number of students he trained, and to the esteem that his students accorded him (C. E. Cleland, 1976, *Cultural Change and Continuity: Essays in Honor of James Bennett Griffin*. Academic Press, New York; 1977, *For the Director: Research Essays in Honor of James B. Griffin*. Anthropological Papers No. 61. Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor).

In one sense Jimmy Griffin was not a hard person to get to know. He attended professional meetings for almost 60 years. His attendance at SAA meetings (which he helped to found in 1934) and the Southeastern Archaeological Conference (which he founded with Jim Ford in 1937) must have set records for both organizations, if anyone had bothered to count. Although his personal side was reserved, he was open professionally to anyone who approached him, especially if they were carrying a new reprint or an unusual sherd. Thus, he met literally hundreds of students and professionals.

Most of his writings were straightforward, with no nonsense. Only in some of his later papers, written after he retired, did he let down his guard a bit. Not that his book reviews were excessively restrained; indeed, he sometimes showed his students tough reviews written in the 1920s and 1930s to teach them what real book reviews were all about: tell the truth about the volume.

His interest and support of archaeology and anthropology were very broad, as is well documented by his long service to SAA. He held many offices in the society including that of president (1951) and was awarded both its Distinguished Service and Fryxell awards. Abroad he served for many years on the Council of the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences and thus carried the U.S. banner, as it were, in Europe for many years. He became well known all over Europe and in the Soviet Union, which he visited after many fits and starts. He also had many ties to Mexico; he studied there, made important contacts, and wrote brief, but strong, discussions on the topic of direct Mexican contact with the Southeast. In the 1980s he refuted this tie, however. Among his many other honors were membership in the National Academy of Sciences, an honorary doctor of science from Indiana University, and the Viking Fund Medal for Archaeology.

Late in his life he explained to an inquiring colleague that he chose anthropology as a major because "I was interested in anthropology from the standpoint of what it told us about societies around the world and through time. I was also interested in explanations of why things happened the way they did" [M. J. O'Brien, 1987, Archaeological Profiles: James B. Griffin. *Missouri Archaeological Society Quarterly* 4(3):15–18].

Those who thought of Jimmy Griffin as a "sherdologist" with no interest in culture or process did not know the man. More's the pity, for they missed a quintessential gentleman, a scholar, a teacher, and a friend. He may have occasionally used "tough love" on his students and those around him (he would have hated that term applied to him), but his frankness and sense of honor were implicit in his every action. We are all the better for it.

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