

HERBERT WRIGHT, JR.

1917–2015

Herbert E. Wright, Jr. was born in Malden, Massachusetts, on September 13, 1917. He died November 12, 2015, in St. Paul, Minnesota. He attended Harvard University for his B.A. (1939), M.A. (1941), and Ph.D. (1943) degrees in geology. His advisor was Kirk Bryan. Wright was finishing his dissertation when the United States entered World War II. He joined the Army Air Corp and received his Ph.D. while serving as a B-17 pilot in the 8th Air Force in England.

In 1946, while at Brown University, he interpreted the stratigraphy at Ksar Akil Cave, an Upper Paleolithic site in Lebanon. This began Wright's long association with Robert Braidwood of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. In 1951, he investigated the Middle Paleolithic site of Barda Barka in Iraq, in 1954–1955 he was with the Jarmo project in Iraq looking at Neolithic sites, and in 1960, he was at Lake Zeribar, Iran interpreting the regional surficial geology and paleoecology. In 1968–1970 Wright joined Braidwood at Cayonu, Turkey, working on the environmental background to the Neolithic revolution.

Wright came to the University of Minnesota in 1948. He established a pollen laboratory there in 1956, recognizing the potential of pollen in lake cores to reconstruct past environments and climates. Soon realizing that lakes had paleo-environmental research potential beyond pollen, Wright established the Limnology Research Center in 1959. He perfected a technique for obtaining and interpreting sediment cores. In 1963, he co-authored a southeastern Minnesota pollen study that established the basic post-glacial vegetational sequence for the Upper Midwest, giving prehistoric cultures an environmental context.

In 1966, Wright joined the Minnesota Messenia expedition in Greece to help reconstruct the Bronze Age environment. In the early 1960s, Paul Martin asked for Wright's assistance in explaining late Pleistocene extinctions of megafauna. In the mid-1970s, William Fitzhugh asked Wright to help with archaeological research in Labrador. He spent portions of five summers there, studying the fire history. Wright then spent parts of six summers in the Peruvian Andes working with archaeologist John Rick and Christine Hasdorf reconstructing the glacial geology and paleoenvironment, focusing on the synchronies of southern to northern hemispheres. Wright

assisted Minnesota archaeology graduate student Tom Shay with interpreting the early prehistoric Itasca Bison Site. Wright later assisted many other Minnesota archaeological graduate students, including Julie Stein and Scott Anfinson.

The 1971 publication of Shay's Itasca Bison Kill brought Wright to the attention of Midwestern archaeologists. His contributions to the understanding of the prehistoric environment of North America were soon widely recognized. He assisted Julie Stein and Patty Jo Watson on reconstructing the fluvial and environmental history of the Green River in western Kentucky. With Anfinson, Wright challenged the accuracy of Late Prehistoric climatic periods, noting that climatic trends were best represented by a single curve. He stressed that climatic conditions of the Midwest were not mirrored to the east.



In 1984, Herb Wright was given the Pomerance Award for Scientific Contributions to Archaeology by the Archaeological Institute of America. In 1989, he was given the Rip Rapp Archaeological Geology Award from the Geological Society of America. In 1993, the Society for American Archaeology gave him the Fryxell Award for Interdisciplinary Research.

Wright's record of helping archaeology is marked by almost 70 years of contributions. This impressive professional accomplishment is only part of the story. Colleagues and former students, whenever together, are quick to lapse into "Herb stories," reminiscing about the character-building adventures that inevitably occurred in the field with Herb. His ability to withstand the most miserable, life-threatening, and often reckless expeditions, even into his last decade, only adds to the shared bond and sense of pride that former students and friends feel when thinking about Herb Wright. The Quaternary research community will deeply miss this amazing scientist, mentor, and friend.

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