



**WILLIAM JEAN BEESON<sup>1</sup>**  
1926–1990

William Jean Beeson died on December 4, 1990, after a long battle against heart disease. Bill left behind a legacy of research, university service, and teaching that significantly affected those with or for whom he worked.

Bill was born in Crawfordsville, Indiana, on June 26, 1926. After service in the U.S. Army Air Corps during the war in the Pacific, Bill began studies in anthropology at the University of Illinois, earning his B.A. in 1951. As a young student, Bill participated as a volunteer laborer in such excavations as the Pool site (in Illinois), and the Mt. Floyd site, Point of Pines, Lehner site, City Plaza site (Tucson), and the Heltagito site (all in Arizona). His Master's thesis (Illinois, 1952) was based on an archaeological survey and limited excavations in portions of the Embarrass and Wabash river valleys.

During his years at the University of Illinois he worked closely with John McGregor, acting as field director under McGregor's supervision in 1952 at the Irving site in Illinois, in 1953 and 1956 at the Pollock site in Arizona, and in 1958 at the Pershing site in Arizona. From 1957 to 1958, Bill worked as a research assistant at the University of Illinois, directing the first year of the Highway Salvage Program in Archaeology for the state of Illinois.

Bill went on to do his doctoral studies with Edward Danson and Emil W. Haury at the University of Arizona and there began a life-long interest in the prehistory of the Southwest and an acute awareness of the relevance of methodology in archaeological problem solving. His doctoral dissertation (1966) was based on an intensive archaeological survey in east-central Arizona.

In 1958, Bill joined the small and relatively new department of anthropology at Sacramento State

American Antiquity, 59(3), 1994, pp. 461–463.  
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College, Sacramento, California (now California State University–Sacramento). There he threw himself into the task of developing a program in central California archaeology, securing funds for a laboratory and creating an accession system—all while teaching a Saturday field class and three other anthropology courses each semester. After acquiring the facilities he set about establishing an active archaeological program for the California Central Valley. He developed both survey programs and excavation programs. The students trained in these programs became the backbone of much of the salvage archaeological work that dominates California archaeology to this day. Bill played a major role in recruiting new faculty and students, planning and equipping the department's three new buildings, and securing storage space throughout the university wherever he could find it.

During this same period he ran a series of very successful travel study programs, visiting prehistoric sites and the Hopi and Navajo reservations in northern Arizona. He also taught summer classes, evening extension classes and, with his wife Marilyn, raised their sons, William and Stephen.

In California, Bill's midwestern and southwestern experience provided him with a fresh perspective on approaches to California prehistory. His involvement with the Central California Archeological Foundation (executive board chairman), the Society for California Archaeology, and his recruitment and training of many of those currently involved in central California leaves a lasting influence.

Bill was widely involved in the life of the university. He was a fraternity advisor and a sponsor and editor of the Sacramento Anthropological Society; actively served on various committees of his department, school, university and academic senate; and served as president of the University Faculty Association. In all of these capacities he brought his considerable wit and erudition. Bill's special talent was to combine these qualities with a knack for accomplishment—he got things done. As a teacher or colleague he was greatly admired by those who could also laugh, think, and contribute—less so by those who lacked some or all of these abilities.

Later in his career and despite increasing heart problems, Bill was able to return to Arizona to continue his research—this time organizing a field school at the Kahorsho site near Flagstaff. Here he renewed his relationship with the Museum of Northern Arizona and his first love, the prehistory of the Southwest.

Bill's enthusiasm for archaeology was boundless and, as many students can testify, quite contagious. Bill was an unusually effective advocate for the discipline and used his considerable powers of persuasion within the university to secure funds, equipment, and space. While field research—and the intellectual challenge this required—was Bill's greatest passion, his concern for students and junior faculty left an indelible mark on many.

JAY BOUTON CRAIN

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#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> My special thanks to Marilyn Beeson for assistance in putting together this material. The lead photograph was taken in Beeson's office at California State University–Sacramento in June 1981 (Gerald Heine, photographer; courtesy Department of Anthropology, California State University–Sacramento).