

NEWSLETTER OF THE
HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGY
INTEREST GROUP
Society for American Archaeology

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 1

JULY 2017

Greetings,

At the last SAA meeting, a number of you asked me if HAIG was becoming inactive – quite the contrary as you will see on the following pages. No, I simply continue to be working on too many projects, most of which are not history of archaeology related – and some of which are not even archaeology related. I think this is true of course for all of us, especially in the current political reality. Many of us are asked to do more in the face of stagnant or shrinking budgets and reduced resources in general. My own solution has been to diversify my academic and scholarly work and emphasize more the role of public outreach. Lately I've been focusing on mastodons:

http://news.vcu.edu/article/VCU_lab_3D_scans_mastodon_fossils_helping_researchers_around.

We should think about how we can use the history of our discipline – and archaeology in general – to fight the forces marshalled against all intellectual inquiry. As I write this, the state of Florida has passed two anti-science bills that threaten the teaching of basic science. Regulations that support archaeological research are being targeted, and federal support of the stewards of our past is in danger. Toward that end, I am working on a poster session “Fighting Anti-Science Hysteria through Public Archaeology.” If anyone has a history of archaeology contribution to this session, I would be happy to include it.

Next year, HAIG will be sponsoring once again the Biennial Gordon R. Willey Symposium on the History of Archaeology. Dr. Katie Kirakosian is organizing a forum entitled “*In the Eyes of the Law: historicizing groundbreaking archaeological legislation from Capitol Hill and beyond.*”

Given that the 2018 SAA annual meeting is in Washington, D.C., this seems quite appropriate, as does the fact that some of this archaeological legislation is threatened by the current political situation. If you are interested in this forum, contact Dr. Kirakosian at:

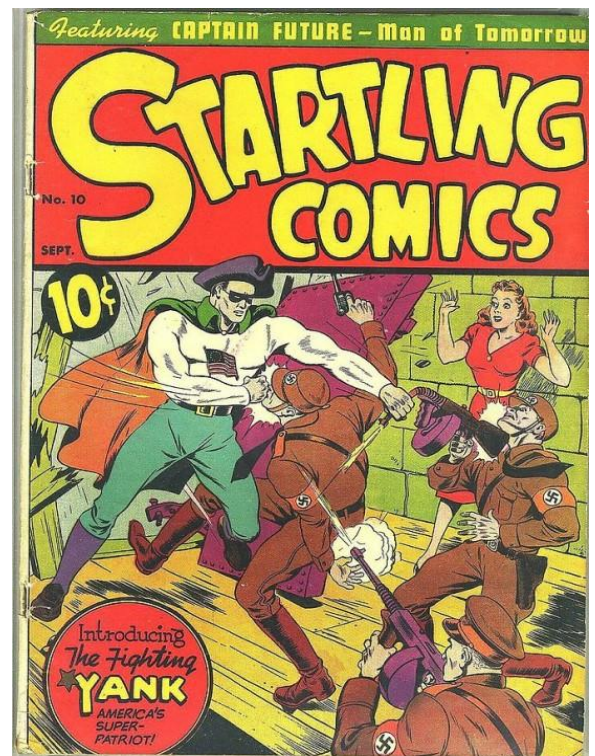
kvkirako@anthro.umass.edu

Cheers,

Bernard K. Means

Send contributions for future issues of the newsletter to:

bkmeans@vcu.edu



The Fighting Yank will help us!
(Image in the Public Domain:
<https://digitalcomicmuseum.com/preview/index.php?did=8728>)

Archiving the Archaeologists

Bernard K. Means, Katie Kirakosian, and Dana Oswald

At the 2016 Society for American Archaeology (SAA) annual meeting, members of the SAA History of Archaeology Interest Group (HAIG) discussed the critical challenges that exist with documenting and researching the history of American archaeology today. For earlier generations, we can rely on a rich trove of physical correspondence that graces many archives to understand theoretical and methodological developments in our discipline—and the people and personalities that guided these developments. However, the documentary record is becoming more intangible and ephemeral as archaeologists increasingly rely on electronic communication and social media. As SAA members age and retire, we risk losing those personal insights that are key to contextualizing American archaeology—and writing future histories of the discipline. Toward that end, the three of us proposed a pilot oral history project designed to capture personal insights and recollections from SAA members at or near retirement, or already retired, and non-members who are acknowledged as key to the development of American archaeology. We argued that there is some urgency toward this project for some older members.

We recommended to the SAA board as part of our proposal the formation of three teams led by the proposal authors to collect oral histories in our respective areas of the country as part of this pilot project. Toward that end, we formulated protocols designed to ensure consistency in the video recording of the oral histories—including the basic questions to be asked as part of the open-ended interviews. We held a forum at the 2017 SAA annual meeting to discuss this project with SAA HAIG members. Working with SAA staff, we arranged a location at the 2017 SAA annual meeting where we could video record oral histories, and we invited specific attendees to participate in the oral history project. We developed appropriate release forms for oral history participants to ensure that all permissions have been obtained so that the final video oral histories can be made available via the SAA web site. Post-production editing will be used to add the appropriate graphical logos to each oral history developed in consultation with SAA staff.

This pilot project was accepted by the SAA Board and we are working to expand it to other regions and identify individuals who can help with this important effort. We also learned at the SAA HAIG meeting at the 2017 SAA meetings of a number of similar efforts, and we will work to compile a comprehensive list for inclusions in future HAIG newsletters as well as a link on the member section for HAIG on the SAA web site. Please contact Bernard K. Means at bkmeans@vcu.edu if you are interested in joining this project, or are aware of oral history interviews or transcripts of interviews with archaeologists that should be brought to a wider audience.



William Baker Nickerson

Ian Dyck

William Baker Nickerson was among the first in North America to receive formal training in archaeology, but he turned to railroading to earn a living. During his spare time, he investigated sites from New England to the Midwest and into the Canadian Prairies. In the course of exploration, he created an elegant and detailed record of discoveries and developed methods which later archaeologists recognized as being ahead of their time. By middle age, he was en route to becoming a professional contract archaeologist.

However, after a very good start, during World War I archaeological commissions disappeared and failed to recover for many years afterward. Consequently, in spite of heroic efforts, Nickerson was unable to restore his scientific career and died in obscurity. His life story spans the transition of North American archaeology from museums and historical societies to universities, throwing light on a phase of history that is little known.

Dyck, Ian

2016 *The Life and Work of W. B. Nickerson (1865-1926): Scientific Archaeology in Central North America*. Co-published by the Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau, and the University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa.



Nickerson (facing camera) in his field camp near Snowflake, Manitoba in August 19. Image used with permission.

Joan E. Freeman
First State Archaeologist for Wisconsin
1931-2017

Marlin Hawley

(Museum Archaeology Program, Wisconsin Historical Society)

Joan E. Freeman, first state archaeologist for Wisconsin, passed away from a stroke, June 23, 2017. Dr. Freeman was born in 1931 in Madison, Wisconsin, attended Lawrence College (BA, history) and the University of Madison (UW), where she graduated as the first female Ph.D. in archaeology. A student and close friend of David A. Baerreis, she spent much time during her years in graduate school assisting him in assembling reports on his WPA excavations in Oklahoma during the 1930s. Her thesis (1956) focused on two Late Woodland sites near Green Bay that had been investigated by Warren L. Wittry, while her doctorate (1959) reported, *The Neosho Focus: A Late Prehistoric Culture in Northeastern Oklahoma*, returned to New Deal era collections from Oklahoma. Appointed as curator of anthropology at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW) in mid-1960, she immediately assumed charge of a newly established highway salvage program – a program then expanding to include work in the proposed Kickapoo Reservoir in southwestern Wisconsin. Freeman had worked as an assistant in the museum at the SHSW from 1954 to the time of her appointment as a full-time employee. She had also actively been involved in fieldwork in Wisconsin, most of which was conducted under the auspices of the Wisconsin Archeological Survey, and had also gained experience in Illinois and South Dakota.



Joan E. Freeman in 1964 at Aztalan. Archaeologist Jay Brandon is driving the caterpillar. Courtesy Museum Archaeology Program, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Freeman conducted important salvage excavations in Wisconsin as curator, including the Price III site, which included a large, Archaic age, cemetery and the Millville site, where evidence was found a Middle Woodland village. She explored Aztalan, a fortified Late Woodland and Middle Mississippian village on the Rock River in south-central Wisconsin, during several seasons in the 1960s on behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, excavating houses and many other features. All of her projects served as training digs for a generation of UW students, including many women, several of whom went on to become professional archaeologists. Although not a prolific writer, she was responsible for exhibits, innumerable field projects, and was involved in drafting Wisconsin Antiquities Act, signed into law in 1965. Her legacy, in addition to important collections, is in the large number of students influenced by her in the field and in the museum. She retired in 1994, but in 2003 after the discovery of the theft of numerous Native American artifacts by a former curator, donated much time in assisting museum staff in assembling a complete list of missing items. She suffered a major stroke in January and moved to Maryland to be close to family two months later. Her passing truly ends an era in Wisconsin archaeology.



Sunset over reconstructed palisade, Aztalan, September 1964. Courtesy Museum Archaeology Program, Wisconsin Historical Society.

**Gates Phillips Thruston (1835-1912):
Union General and Tennessee Archaeologist**

*Donald B. Ball
(Independent Researcher, Louisville, Kentucky)*

Born in Dayton, Ohio, on June 11, 1835, Gates Phillips Thruston (Figure 1) was a graduate of Miami University and Cincinnati Law School (cf. Bierer 1997:500), and attained the rank of major in the US Army during the Civil War while serving as assistant Adjutant General of US Volunteers. He was commissioned a Brevet Brigadier General USV on March 13, 1865 (for further biographical information concerning his military and post-war career, see Hale 1913 and Houk 1914). Following the war, he settled in Nashville, Tennessee, resumed his law practice, and as fate would have it developed a deep interest in the then abundant and easily accessible antiquities of the central Cumberland Valley.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Thruston was established as the “dean” of Middle Tennessee archaeology with the 1890 release of the first edition of his well received and justly applauded volume titled *The Antiquities of Tennessee and the Adjacent States* and his amassing an extraordinary (and still intact) collection of Native American pottery vessels and other artwork from in and around Nashville. Aside from being documented at length by Thruston (1890; 1897a; 1904), his research and resultant collection is variously discussed in sources such as Anonymous (1890a; 1890b; 1890c), Cox (1986), Fletcher (1891), Glenn (1910), McGaw and Weesner (1965), Pierce (1891), and Smith (1998). Additional illustrations of but a minor sampling of the many items in this collection appear in Fundaburk and Foreman (1957:Plates 8, 115, 119, 120, 121, 123, 124, and 129). These materials are currently displayed at the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville. As noted by Smith (1998), following the release of the first edition of his book:

...Thruston's collection rapidly achieved international prominence. He received a bronze medal for his exhibition at the 1893 Columbian Historical Exposition in Madrid. During the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition, he received a gold medal for the “finest individual exhibition in any department,” and another gold medal at the later Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis.

In 1907 Thruston sought a suitable repository for his collections. He offered them to the State of Tennessee, if it would provide a suitable exhibit building. The legislature declined to provide exhibit space, prompting Thruston to donate the collection to Vanderbilt [University in Nashville]. In an ironic twist that would almost certainly have pleased Thruston, Vanderbilt and the Tennessee State Museum entered into an

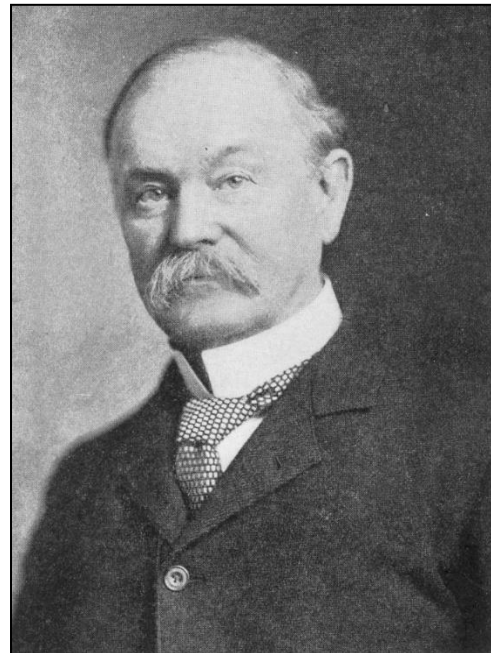


Figure 1. Gates Phillips Thruston (1835-1912) (reproduced from Houk 1914:frontispiece). Image in the Public Domain.

agreement incorporating the collection into the Museum's permanent exhibits on Tennessee's native peoples in 1986.

The assertion that Thruston was the "dean" of Middle Tennessee archaeology should be placed within the context of the era in which he lived and worked. Aside from the explorations conducted by Joseph Jones published by the Smithsonian Institution (Jones 1876; see also Jones 1869) and Frederic Ward Putnam on behalf of the Peabody Museum (Putnam 1973), Thruston was by far the most visible of the area's late 19th century collectors though by no stretch of the imagination was he the only one. In the context of a footnote appearing in *Antiquities of Tennessee*, Thruston (1897a:174-175) observed,

There are a number of collections of pottery in Nashville from the graves and mounds of Middle Tennessee. The [Tennessee] Historical Society has a large collection. Messrs. Otto Giers, E. C. Wells, W. D. Buchanan, Captain J. R. Johnson, Norman Farrell, Frank Morrow, Dr. R. A. Halley, Frank Cheatham, Vanderbilt University, Prof. Wright (of Fisk University), Miss Mary Maxwell, Mrs. J. P. Drouillard, Mrs. John Overton, and perhaps others, have collections or small cabinets of ancient pottery. J. B. Nicklin of Chattanooga, Dr. J. F. Grant of Pulaski, The South-western [sic] University and Miss Killebrew of Clarksville, John [sic; Jay] G. Cisco of Jackson, and the Rev. C. F. Williams of Maury, have some good specimens.

With rare exception (notably Jay Guy Cisco and Dr. James Thomas Grant, not "J. F. Grant" as stated by Thruston), there are no known reports attributable to the archaeological activities of the individuals named by Thruston (cf. Ball 1976) and it is to be presumed that the collections they assembled have long since been dispersed. In addition to clearly demonstrating the keen degree of interest being directed toward the region's prehistoric remains, Thruston's account must give modern researchers reason to seriously reassess the total number of graves which were excavated or outright looted throughout the central Cumberland Valley region during the late nineteenth century. Despite any academic pretensions which may have been present in the antiquarians enumerated by Thruston, it remains a reality of life that selling antiquities is certainly not a new phenomenon as amply attested by advertisements of various artifact dealers appearing in the unnumbered trailer pages in Warren King Moorehead's 1900 volume titled *Prehistoric Implements: A Reference Book* (Moorehead 1900). There is no reason to presume other than that some individuals of that era (in common with our own) were motivated only by monetary gain to devote their spare time to searching for marketable relics thus further depleting a finite and already dwindling cultural resource. We are left to wonder how many thousands of these late prehistoric burial places were demolished with no trace of their existence ever recorded.

It is unfortunate that no personal papers attributable to Thruston have yet surfaced which might provide additional insight on his extensive collecting activities in and around Nashville. Regrettably, the "General Gates P. Thruston Papers" maintained in the Special Collections of the Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, are particularly uninformative and relate only to the period 1900-1910. The only item therein referable to his archaeological interests is a copy of Glenn (1910) (cf. <<http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/speccol/thrustong.shtml>>). In part, the mystery of the disposition of Gates P. Thruston's personal papers was addressed by his sister,

Eliza P. T. Houk, in the foreword to her posthumously published biographical study of her brother wherein (Houk 1914:5) remarked:

This is a tribute of duty as well as of love. All of the data for it were found among my brother's private papers which were given to me. Also his public records, commissions, army orders, addresses, speeches upon various occasions, all came into my possession. He had already given me books, papers and all of the correspondence of his dear son Gates to dispose of as seemed best.

Regrettably, Eliza Houk made but passing mention of her brother's extensive archaeological activities. The subsequent disposition of these papers is presently unknown.

Whereas previous academic efforts in the Cumberland Valley prior to Thruston's studies were largely focused on human osteology and the related burial goods (most notably Troost 1845 and Jones 1876), he undertook a more sweeping examination of both the art and utilitarian handicrafts of the region and, indeed, illustrated for the first time a variety of materials now known to be attributable to much earlier occupations. With tongue in cheek humor, Thruston (1897a:v-vi) amusingly recounts his experiences in the process of preparing the second edition of *The Antiquities of Tennessee*:

Unfortunately, engrossing business engagements and duties have seriously interrupted the leisure necessary to the satisfactory preparation of the work. Most of the chapters have been written in the office of the "President and Attorney" of the State Insurance Company of Tennessee, where contracts and mortgages, and old flints and vessels from the graves, have been piled upon the *same office desk*, during the past year or more; but my antiquarian friends may be assured that the "old relics and pots" have received an ample share of consideration, and have been regarded as fully as interesting and important as the more commercial treasures [*italics in original*].

After "exploring" (or paying others to do the digging for him) several thousand stone box graves, there is no small irony in Thruston (1897a:174) remarking, "We have endeavored ...to prevent indiscriminate ransacking and pillaging by inexperienced relic hunters, and we have urged upon all the duty of examining the [stone box] graves with care and intelligence, with a view to preserving all objects and articles, however insignificant, in any way illustrating the industries and habits of these ancient tomb builders."

In a lesser known and prosaically written article titled "Nashville: The Advance-Guard of Western Civilization," published near the end of his active archaeological activities, Thruston (1900:477-478) melodramatically (one almost expects this piece to open with the phrase "It all began on a dark and stormy night...") recounted his vision of the fate which befell the early occupants of the Cumberland Valley:

The beautiful site upon which the city of Nashville stands must have been famous in prehistoric times. Its natural salt spring near the bank of the Cumberland River was a noted resort of the Indian and buffalo. Some years ago the huge bones of a mastodon were exhumed from the alluvial deposit upon its margin. Near the flowing spring was an ancient cemetery of the long-vanished Stone Grave race, the mound-builders, of Tennessee, and upon the opposite bank of the river and in the adjacent valleys have been found not less than ten thousand rude stone cists containing their mortuary remains. These interesting memorials have yielded a vast store of archaeological treasures, illustrating their arts [pg. 478] and industries and telling a pathetic story of aboriginal life in the valley of the Cumberland.

A race of Village Indians, probably akin to the Pueblo Builders or Village Indians of New Mexico and Arizona, once made their home in Middle Tennessee and the adjacent territory. These industrious pottery makers and mound builders must have dwelt for several centuries in this lovely Garden of Eden.

In an evil hour, unhappily, some destroyer came, perhaps the ancestors of the savage and vindictive Mohawk or Iroquois Indians of the north, and devastated their towns and homes and scattered or exterminated the humble and less warlike Villagers. The first white hunters and pioneers discovered in the shadowy forest only their strange and mysterious mounds, and the ancient lines of earthworks that had formed their forts. For perhaps a hundred years or more before the advent of the white man, the beautiful valley of the Cumberland seems to have been a wilderness uninhabited save by the wild animals of the forest.

It may be noted that these remarks serve as an insightful commentary on the "shallow" chronology Thruston applied to the remains he so avidly studied. This trend would continue in the research subsequently conducted in the Cumberland Valley by William Edward Myer (Ball 2011).

Among other academic activities, Thruston served as Corresponding Secretary of the Tennessee Historical Society. His name is inextricably linked to the well-known Thruston tablet discovered near the Mississippian-era Castalian Springs mound center in Sumner County, Tennessee (Holmes 1891). In addition to his lesser and better known archaeological studies (Thruston 1885; 1888a; 1890; 1892; 1893; 1896; 1897a; 1897b; 1898a; 1904), he also published several articles on Nashville area historical topics (e.g., Thruston 1898b; 1900; 1901; 1902), papers on Civil War history (Boynton et al. 1903; Thruston 1888b; 1906; 1911), and a volume on Thruston family genealogy (Thruston 1909). Following his long and productive career as an army officer, attorney, and pioneer archaeologist, he died at his home in Nashville, Tennessee, on December 9, 1912. He was interred in Nashville's Mount Olivet Cemetery.

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Recent or Noteworthy Publications

Editor's note: As is usual and very much appreciated, Marlin Hawley has worked diligently and most of the references below result from his efforts. Donald Ball has contributed as well.

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