

ALEX D. KRIEGER¹ 1911–1991

American archaeology lost one of its most widely respected cultural historians when Alex Dony Krieger died of heart failure on April 1, 1991, at his home in Seattle, Washington. He is well remembered for his catholic geographical and topical research interests, critical manner, ability to synthesize information from different fields, and willingness to help anyone with a serious interest in archaeology. His most important work concerns artifact typologies, southern Caddoan cultural history and its broader relationships, connections between the southeastern United States and Mesoamerica, and early humans in the New World. More than any archaeologist before or since, he brought Texas prehistory into the national limelight and in doing so left us with many insights on a variety of issues. These notable contributions become even more impressive when it is realized that throughout his adult life he suffered from bilateral loss of hearing and an incessant, high-pitched ringing in the ears.

Alex was born on December 11, 1911, in Duluth, Minnesota, but grew up primarily in southern California. Upon graduation from South Pasadena High School in 1929, he was awarded a yearlong scholarship to Stanford University. Having no money to continue beyond his freshman term, he spent the next three years working at sundry jobs to earn a living, help support his mother, and save for college. Later the source of many an interesting, often humorous tale, his employment during these early depression years included operating a gas station with his brother, selling zippers door-to-door, and shipping out on merchant vessels as a deck and boiler hand. It was during this period that Alex had his initial brush with archaeology. While visiting Sonora, Mexico, he joined up with a man who claimed to be an explorer and who was organizing an expedition to find Indian relics and lost treasure. Although they located and dug into a burial cave, the affair turned out to be a dreadful misadventure. Mexican authorities confiscated the recovered archaeological material, and the "explorer" disappeared with the horses and equipment, leaving Alex stranded with neither food nor money. Thanks to help from local villagers he made it back to the U.S., angry but with a life-long affection for Mexico and its people.

American Antiquity, 58(4), 1993, pp. 614-621. Copyright © 1993 by the Society for American Archaeology In 1933 Alex enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley and, after taking just one course in anthropology during his junior year, became an anthropology major. When he left Berkeley at the end of the summer of 1937 to accept a position at the University of Oregon, he had a Bachelor's degree, one year of graduate studies, and two years of employment as a student preparator in the Anthropology Museum (later the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, and now the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology). And, during the summer of 1936, he, Robert F. Heizer, and several other students (including Richard K. Beardsley) excavated Humboldt Cave, a major occupation and cache site in the western part of the Great Basin. Of his experiences at Berkeley, it was Alex's contact with A. L. Kroeber (as he reflected in an 1961 essay entitled "On Being Critical") that most influenced his thinking and approaches as a professional archaeologist.

Shortly after Alex and his wife of a year, Merle LaRue (a fellow anthropology student at Berkeley), moved to Eugene he began fieldwork for the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oregon. Under the direction of L. S. Cressman, he excavated several sites, most notably Catlow Cave in southeastern Oregon. While at Oregon, Alex also supervised student digs, taught field techniques, and, in 1938, completed his Master's degree. His thesis, which was done under the guidance of Cressman, was entitled *Environment, Population, and Prehistory in the Northwestern United States*. The far-reaching scope, thoroughness, and kinds of cultural historical questions addressed presaged much that would become characteristic of Alex's research.

Alex and Luther Cressman did not get along well and, as a result, Krieger left the University of Oregon in 1939, at the close of the spring semester. The summer of that year was spent in eastern Washington, at a temporary job conducting an archaeological survey and overseeing the removal of burials in the area to be flooded by the Grand Coulee Dam. Just as this job was about to end, Alex was offered the position of Supervisor of the University of Texas Works Progress Administration (WPA) Laboratory in Austin.

In the fall of 1939, Alex headed for Austin, where shortly thereafter he was joined by his wife and their year-old son, Alex Jr. Their only other child, Diane, was born several years later. Though Alex and Merle divorced in 1942 they remained friends until she died in the early 1970s. In 1944 Alex married Margery Hayes, then an undergraduate major in anthropology and later a successful psychologist. Until her graduate studies and then professional responsibilities made it impractical, Margery helped Alex with his research and often accompanied him on research trips and to meetings.

The 17 years (1939–1956) spent in various archaeological research capacities with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas (UT) were the most productive of Alex's career. He brought Texas archaeology into the modern, scientific era and, within a remarkably short period of time, became a nationally recognized authority on the archaeology of east Texas and adjacent areas. Much of his expertise came from the many hours he spent analyzing institutional and private collections, often at his own expense. It was not at all uncommon to find Alex working in an otherwise deserted lab late into the night and on weekends; and many of the Krieger family vacations were spent visiting sites, excavations in progress, and museums. In keeping with his very deliberate work habits, Alex would frequently leave notes on the UT collections he had studied. Typically written on small scraps of paper and placed in the appropriate collection box or sack, these notes remain valuable sources of information. Several years ago, for example, I came across one when opening a small paper bag of sherds collected during a WPA survey. It read "Hopewell [underlined twice] rim, 6-148-16, San Augustine Co., Texas; identified by Dr. J. B. Griffin."

Working closely with the late Clarence H. Webb, Alex developed an encompassing cultural-historical framework for the interpretation of southern Caddoan prehistory by the early 1940s. Although it has been considerably modified over the years, this scheme greatly advanced Caddoan archaeology and is still one of the better examples of the application of the Midwestern Taxonomic System. It was complemented by the Caddoan ceramic typology also formulated by Krieger and Webb. Because their discerning definitions, most of these pottery types continue to be used—often with little modification.

In 1946 Alex published Cultural Complexes and Chronology in Northern Texas, one of the most significant monographs to come out of Texas archaeology. Using Puebloan trade items and other

lines of evidence, he extended the comparatively well-established southwestern chronology (based primarily on tree-ring dates) across northern Texas to the lower Mississippi Valley. In doing so, he argued (rightly, as ¹⁴C assays later proved) that most of the southeastern temporal schemes popular at the time were much too compressed. This work also synthesized a tremendous amount of archaeological data, much of which had not been previously published; presented what is today the only detailed description available for the T. M. Sanders site, a major Caddoan mound center on the Red River; and elaborated his framework for classification of Caddoan cultural complexes. For this and other distinguished contributions he was awarded the Viking Fund Medal in Archaeology for 1948.

The next year another outstanding work, *The George C. Davis Site, Cherokee County, Texas*, appeared as Memoir No. 5 of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA). Coauthored with H. Perry Newell (who excavated the site but died before the analysis was completed), this volume remains a classic study and a good model for a site report. Typical of Alex's work, it handles complex information and ideas forcibly and with remarkable clarity, is attentive to details yet makes farreaching comparisons, and offers provocative alternative interpretations.

Handbook of Texas Archeology, a major synthesis written in collaboration with Dee Ann Suhm and Edward B. Jelks, appeared in 1955 (but carries the publication date of 1954). The same year, The Midland Discovery, coauthored with Fred Wendorf, Claude C. Albritton, and T. D. Stewart, was issued by the University of Texas Press. And in 1956 Alex and Robert F. Heizer published Archaeology of Humboldt Cave, Churchill County, Nevada, a monograph on the site they excavated while students at Berkeley. While all of these works are notable contributions, the Handbook stands out as one of the then few comprehensive statewide archaeological summaries. It also was among the pioneers in its use of cultural stages and definitions of projectile-point types (some new, some not). The section on east Texas is Alex's last major statement on Caddoan archaeology.

In addition to these volumes, he wrote a number of landmark articles on issues that ranged from method and theory in artifact classification to New World culture history and was a frequent contributor to the book-review sections of the *American Antiquity*, *American Anthropologist*, and other major journals. The articles written in the 1940s and 1950s deal with a wide variety of topics and issues but are united by certain recurring methodological concerns; namely, the need for archaeologists to: (1) develop suitable frameworks (at all levels of analysis) for comparative studies; (2) trace the distribution and context of traits over large geographical areas; (3) integrate archaeological, geological, and climatological findings; and (4) view their evidence from different perspectives.

Alex considered critiquing published work (and any manuscript sent to him) to be an important professional obligation. Moreover, he felt it was the reviewer's job to note corrections, to make the reader aware of other possible readings of the evidence, and to mention important data not available to the author (i.e., new or unpublished). Not surprisingly, he was known as both a thorough and, at times, harsh reviewer. Not unaware of his reputation in this regard, he wrote in one 1952 review (of *The Comanches, Lords of the South Plains* by E. Wallace and E. A. Hoebel) "Contrary to my well-known habits, I could not find anything to criticize."

For eight years (1950–1958) Alex acted as an assistant editor of American Antiquity, compiling the "Early Man" section of "Notes and News." Rich in detail, these vignettes provide useful information as well as a valuable perspective on the history of "Early Man" studies. They also are notable for their frequent inclusion of findings in Latin America which, one has to suspect, reflects Alex's interest as well as good rapport with Mexican and South American scholars. Alex further served the SAA as a member of the Executive Committee from 1950 to 1952.

Krieger had a long and active association with the Texas Archeological Society (TAS) as well. Between 1953 and 1956 he edited the annual *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society*, and in 1952 served as president. Other elected positions he held with this society were member of the Board of Directors (1947–1948), active vice president (1949–1950), and trustee (1951). Alex was very accessible and encouraging to responsible artifact collectors and did much to launch a tradition

in Texas of goodwill and cooperation between professional and avocational archaeologists. In recognition of his service to the Texas society and contributions to Texas archaeology, he was elected a TAS fellow in 1955.

The same year he received his Doctor of Science degree in anthropology from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Because of his professional stature, those who did not know Alex usually assumed—to his embarrassment—that he had a Doctor's degree. Thus, in addition to resulting in a dissertation that presents probably the best route for Cabeza de Vaca through Texas and perhaps northern Mexico as well, he no longer had to correct anyone who called him "Dr. Krieger."

Despite his many career successes while at the University of Texas, Alex became discouraged by what he considered to be a lack of adequate support for his research and too limited involvement in the teaching program. Unlike so many of his colleagues, he received no significant amount of help from student assistants nor stimulation from work with graduate students. Moreover, during his tenure at UT the graduate program was small and offered only a Master's degree.

In 1956 he left UT to become director of the Riverside Municipal Museum, in Riverside, California, where he stayed until 1960, when he moved to Seattle, Washington. The three and half years spent in Riverside were a striking change of pace for Alex. The museum consisted primarily of specimens in showcases located in the basement of a building that housed the local police department. Transforming it into an attractive and useful education facility was a challenge, a task that was both frustrating and a welcome change for Alex. It was during his stay in Riverside that he had his first chance to teach since being at Oregon. This opportunity came in the form of a lecture course at the University of California, Riverside, and a once-a-week graduate seminar at the University of Southern California (USC). Unfortunately, teaching was not considered to be part of his museum responsibilities. He consequently had to offer his courses in the evening and, moreover, make a 120-mile round trip from Riverside to Los Angeles to teach at USC. Not unexpectedly, he found little time to work on original research. He did, however, continue to publish, especially his incisive book reviews.

In 1959 Alex was awarded a National Science Foundation grant to assist him in the preparation of a book on Early Man in the New World. Since he was not allowed to take a leave of absence, he resigned his position with the Riverside Museum and in 1960 moved to Seattle. Here the Kriegers planned to stay just several years, but both found Seattle and employment there much to their liking.

In the mid-1960s Alex became involved in an archaeological highway-salvage program at Washington. This program was relatively new, and Alex was able to expand its scope as well as get students involved in many of the field projects. Then, in 1964, he was offered a part-time position in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Washington, and, the next year, a tenured position as a full professor. Although he remained involved with the highway-salvage program until the 1970s, most of his energy went into teaching, something he had so long wanted to do.

In 1979 Alex retired from the University of Washington and was honored at a celebration given by the Northwest Anthropological Society. After retirement, he continued to work on research projects, especially his interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca's trek across Texas and northern Mexico, but, regrettably this comprehensive work (and the "Early Man" study), did not reach a stage he regarded as publishable.

Alex always demanded much of himself as a scholar and a writer. He wrote to inform a diverse audience, for he enjoyed being an archaeologist and sharing his knowledge and insights with others, whether a professional colleague, beginning student, or interested amateur. He contributed much to further our understanding of New World archaeology and influenced in many positive ways a number of professional careers. His compassion and good humor will be fondly remembered and surely passed on, as his anecdotes and adventures are recounted by those of us who had the good fortune to know him well.

DEE ANN STORY

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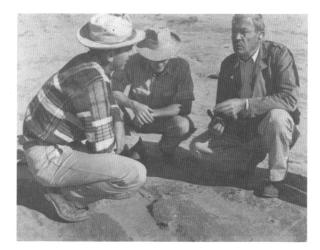
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NOTES

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The lead photograph was taken in the mid-1980s while Alex was visiting Hal and Dee Ann Story. ² Compiled by Alex D. Krieger; edited by Margery Krieger and Dee Ann Story.



The Midland site (41MD1), west Texas, mid-1950s (from left to right): Fred Wendorf, Ed Jelks, and Alex Krieger (courtesy of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas, Austin).