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Robert Herre Crabtree Remembered



ROBERT HERRE CRABTREE was born in Chehalis, Washington, September 27, 1929, and died of cancer in Tonopah, Nevada, January 17, 1986. Robert's early years were spent in western Washington where he attended the University of Washington, receiving his Master's degree in 1957. During the early 1950s Robert worked nearly every summer in Plateau archaeology and wrote an important thesis on the archaeology of Rabbit Island and the Pot Holes site. He also co-authored several important papers on Northwest archaeology. He made a most significant contribution in "Northwest Coastal-Interior Relationships," written with Douglas Osborne and Warren Caldwell.

From early 1956 to mid 1960, Robert worked as an archaeologist, first on the

Pacific Northwest Pipeline and then for Shell Pipeline in the Southwest. During this time he also attended the University of Arizona. In June of 1960 he moved to UCLA where he became a teaching and research assistant, and research archaeologist in the Archaeological Survey. While at UCLA, he worked at various sites in southern and central California and in Colima, Mexico, and co-authored the report on Batiquitos Lagoon with D. L. True and me.

In the mid 1960s Robert's life came apart. He was divorced, left school, and for the next four years supported his two children by driving cabs in Los Angeles. This was a job he detested, and in 1969 he quit and moved to Las Vegas where he became associated with the Nevada Archaeological Survey and the Department of Anthropology. These were the "infant" years of the Department of Anthropology and the Nevada Archaeological Survey--a time of large enrollments and few faculty members, of numerous contracts in cultural resource management, but few qualified students. Robert made a vital contribution to the development of the Anthropology program, teaching classes almost every semester and undertaking fieldwork for the Archaeological Survey. He taught the UNLV Lost City Field School in 1971 and shared that responsibility with me in 1970, 1972, and 1973. In 1972 Robert and I submitted the first version of the chapter on the Southwest Great Basin for the *Handbook of North American Indians*.

In the traditional sense, Robert was not a great teacher. But while he was ill at ease in the classroom, outside the formal setting Robert relaxed, and students found him a

delight to talk with. It was in those innumerable informal discussions that Crabtree, the teacher, was found by both student and colleague. Robert's gifts as a teacher were especially obvious in the field schools he taught and in the work with the amateur archaeologists in southern Nevada. Robert began offering workshops for the Archeo-Nevada Society in 1969. Informal and largely unstructured, these workshops were the ideal format for Crabtree's teaching strengths. Today, largely as a result of his efforts, the Archeo-Nevada Society is a group of well-trained avocationalists who are contributing to the development of southern Nevada archaeology. This perhaps was Crabtree's greatest teaching achievement and it is with great fondness and sense of loss that the members of Archeo-Nevada remember Robert H. Crabtree.

During 1973, Crabtree returned to southern California where he served as Director of Archaeology for Archaeological Research, Incorporated. He supervised archaeological projects in the Imperial Valley and on the southern California coast. In 1976 he returned to Las Vegas where he worked for the University while still retained as consultant for Archaeological Research, Incorporated. During this period, Crabtree and I published a note on a Chumash pottery jar and he collaborated with others on monographs on the archaeology of the Mojave and Colorado deserts.

In 1979 he joined the Bureau of Land Management staff and was assigned to the Battle Mountain District. Later he was transferred to Tonopah, where he was working when he became ill.

There was so much more to Robert H. Crabtree than his professional record reflects. I knew him for more than 30 years, and during those years he became my closest friend. Robert was a private man who liked

to putter around in his garden, was especially fond of raising herbs, and was a superb cook. He liked good food, good drink, and good books.

Robert was the nearest thing to a "Renaissance Man" I ever met. He had a mind that seemed to capture and store away great quantities of information which he delighted in retrieving in long rambling conversation over a beer. He loved history, literature, poetry, and music. He played the acoustic guitar and sang in a voice somewhat like Burl Ives'. He was a man with a great sense of humor who loved many things and disliked few. Most importantly, he brought to his friends and students a relationship of rare quality, of warmth and richness of life, a kind of earthiness, that marked him as a powerful teacher and wonderful human being.

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