

## **UC Merced**

### **The Journal of California Anthropology**

#### **Title**

A Tribute to Sherburne Friend Cook

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1g31b028>

#### **Journal**

The Journal of California Anthropology, 3(1)

#### **Author**

Brooks, Sheilagh T.

#### **Publication Date**

1976-07-01

Peer reviewed

# A Tribute to Sherburne Friend Cook 1896 - 1974



S(herburne) F(riend) Cook became well known in anthropology, particularly archaeology and physical anthropology, through his research interests in the physiology and morbidity of aboriginal populations in both California and Mesoamerica. His recent death is a loss to many aspects of the field of physiology, but especially so to anthropolo-

gists who used his numerous papers and articles on the biochemical and physical composition of archaeological sites, the statistical and demographical analyses of causes of death of post-European contact American aboriginal populations and his theoretical concepts about the microanatomy of bone.

S. F. Cook was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, December 31, 1896, studied at Harvard University both as a graduate and undergraduate student, acquiring his A.B. in 1919, A.M. in 1923, and Ph.D. in physiology in 1925. After a brief time teaching as an instructor at Harvard, he joined the Physiology Department at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1928. He remained at Berkeley as a professor and later chairman of the department until his retirement in 1966.

It may have been his interest in environmental physiology, which he has cited in a biographical listing for *American Men and Women of Science* (Vol. 1, 1971, p. 1154), which led to his collaboration with R. F. Heizer and Adan Treganza on the physical and biochemical analyses of the midden composition of archaeological sites in Central California. Cook's contribution to the anthropological knowledge of the effects of European contact in the form of diseases, deaths from forced alteration of lifestyles, and from excessive punishments of California aboriginal populations, is currently considered so pertinent to the fields of archaeology and ethnology

that it was recently proposed that a volume of his collected papers on this subject be prepared for re-publication. His productivity and research were continuously expanding into new concepts or proposals. It was he who suggested the term "palaeodemography" for investigation into the dynamics of ancient populations (Jarcho 1966), now an important aspect of the physical anthropological approach to archaeologically recovered skeletal material in conjunction with palaeopathology and palaeoepidemiology.

It was my privilege to work for and with S. F. Cook from 1959 to 1963 as an assistant during his research into the microanatomy of bone and the cause-and-effect relationships of permineralization or fossilization on bone. This was at a time well before "affirmative action," but Cook was totally uninterested in whether his staff was male or female. His only concern was their competence, and our particular research project happened to be completely staffed with women. Although the ideas for the major research emanated from Cook, independent projects were totally acceptable for experimentation, and publications included as authors the names of all concerned, whether students, faculty, or staff (another rare trait, especially at the University of California, Berkeley, at that time).

Cook's conversations were fascinating, ranging widely on a variety of subjects relevant

to his listeners, and stimulated additional ideas and experimentation. I remember one casual comment in a discussion on California archaeological midden size which is as intriguing today as it was ten years ago (and still not fully explored): the size of a midden will depend on how far the oldest woman will walk to dump her garbage! His research into anthropological problems continues to be significant, and those of us who had the pleasure of collaborating with him will always benefit from the close contact with his provocative and productive ideas.

*Sheilagh T. Brooks*  
*University of Nevada*  
*Las Vegas*

## REFERENCES

- American Men and Women of Science  
1971 Twelfth Edition, Vol. 1. New York and London: Jacques Cattell Press/R. R. Bowker Co.
- Jarcho, Saul, ed.  
1966 Human Palaeopathology. Proceedings of a Symposium on Human Palaeology held in Washington, D.C., January 14, 1965. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Who's Who in America  
1954 Volume 28, 1954-1955. Chicago. Marquis Who's Who.

