



**CLARENCE HUNGERFORD WEBB<sup>1</sup>**  
**1902-1991**

An American archaeologist of exceptional merit and note passed from the scene when Clarence Hungerford Webb died January 18, 1991, in Shreveport, Louisiana. Dr. Webb was considered by his friends and colleagues to have been the outstanding amateur archaeologist in the southern United States.

Dr. Webb was born near Shreveport on August 25, 1902, and spent nearly his entire life in that city. He grew up in a rural environment filled with feelings of home security, closeness of family, and learning about self-reliance. He entered Tulane University at age 17 earning an undergraduate degree in 1923 and his medical degree in 1925. After establishing himself and marrying Dorothy Dodd, daughter of Monroe E. Dodd, a nationally known Baptist Church leader, he went to the University of Chicago for a Master's degree in Pediatrics. Although while yet in high school he had resolved to become a medical missionary, his new degree and young family made him decide that it was not necessary to go to Africa to heal sick babies. He and another young medical friend founded the first "Well Baby" clinic in the Shreveport Public Health Department. The clinic served the area for nearly 50 years.

Clarence Webb's interest in archaeology began much as another parental duty. In 1934 while accompanying his two youthful sons on a Boy Scout camping trip near Menas, Arkansas, he was taken to an area where "Indian relics" could be found. It is evident now that this day's simple

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pleasure was to change his life (J. Gibson, *Louisiana Archaeological Society Newsletter* 2(2):4–7, 1975).

Dr. Webb's next move was to contact two Shreveport collectors, Edward Neild and Michael Beckman. Both men were trained in the sciences and became Webb's lifelong friends and frequent digging companions. He also systematically began to ingest the literature and promptly read a paper by Gerard Fowke of the Smithsonian Institution that recounted the finding of steatite vessel fragments at Poverty Point in northeast Louisiana. This report was the first written about this remarkable site since the time of Clarence B. Moore. In 1935 Webb took foot in hand and went to Poverty Point. He promptly uncovered a cache of about 1,500 stone-vessel fragments. That was the first of his many visits to the site either meticulously surface collecting with friends or making strategic test pits.

Webb's first total site excavation was not undertaken until several years later. During this time a remarkable event was transpiring in America. Salvage archaeology was burgeoning, particularly in the South, where excavation programs were developing in several states. In Louisiana the first project that employed relief workers was at the Marksville site in 1933. There Frank Setzler, on loan from the Smithsonian Institution, aided by a young James Ford became mentors for a young Clarence Webb. As federal programs opened further in Louisiana he met dedicated men such as George Quimby and Gordon Willey who were freshly armed with college degrees in anthropology. In the next few years Webb was exposed to Arden R. King, Robert Stuart Neitzel, Edwin Doran, Carlyle Smith, and William Malloy—all college-trained field men who gladly shared ideas of proper data recovery with him.

Ford and Doran were former students of Fred Kniffen at Louisiana State University. Quite independently but almost simultaneously Kniffen and Ford conceived of using the stratigraphic position of potsherds in a midden for developing cultural chronology. Although stratigraphic control of excavations for chronology had been employed in the Southwest, this was not the inspiration for Kniffen and Ford. Their interest in stratigraphy can be traced to their geological training in college. Also in the late 1930s Webb met James B. Griffin who helped launch him in the proper channels for learning about pottery classification.

It was also about this time that an archaeological program was begun in Oklahoma. At the university Clarence became friends with Robert Bell, David Baerreis, and Kenneth Orr, and he learned from all of them. Excavations soon began in Texas, and there he met Alex Krieger with whom he worked on mutual interests for several decades (see Webb, *Louisiana Archaeological Bulletin* 1:1–7, 1974).

Clarence began serious excavations in the mid-1930s, which was the nascent period of theory construction in the United States for modern archaeology. The Midwestern Taxonomic System, then in its infancy, was the clothesline upon which everyone tried to hang his or her new baby's linen. That Poverty Point was a unique, widely distributed culture was not yet conceptualized. Also, all over the land where this "new" archaeology was being practiced archaeologists gathered to share their problems and their solutions. Several working conferences were formed such as the Southeastern Conference (1938). Clarence was a charter member of the Society for American Archaeology and joined the Texas Archaeological Society before 1940. He attended annual meetings and participated in paper presentations.

Fortunately for American archaeology Webb entered the field as a mature scholar. He quickly realized that desirable and rewarding goals lay beyond the artifacts. He well knew that he must share his newly discovered information, hence, he did have an extensive and timely publication record.<sup>2</sup>

Living as he did in Shreveport, near the center of the recognizable Caddo country, Webb had known all of his life about the prehistoric and historic Indian predecessors near at hand. Despite spectacular excavations by Moore of Philadelphia and Dellinger of Arkansas, the archaeology of the entire area was little known in the 1930s. Webb conspired with Krieger to begin the formulation of Caddoan prehistory. He devised a pertinent pottery nomenclature and classification. In 1936 he began the excavation of Belcher Mound. This was accomplished over the next five years on weekends with all volunteer workers, although his two sons may have judged it to be forced labor. Nearly a

decade was devoted to the study of this mound and subsequent publication of research results, but his attention was now directed toward the delineation of the "Caddo problem." In 1942 Webb organized the first Caddo Conference. After the war he revived it, and five persons including William G. Haag and John Cotter, then working on the Natchez Trace with the National Park Service, attended. Today the Conference is the viable medium for the study of Caddo culture. Its thirty-third annual meeting was held in 1991.

Although Webb's first visit to the Poverty Point site in West Carroll Parish in Louisiana was in 1935, for the next few years he periodically collected the site, the time depending on the condition of the plowed fields. Thus he began to amass a well-documented surface collection from the site. He also visited every major collector he could find throughout Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. His old friend, Michael Beckman, a geologist living in Shreveport, had spent many days in the Poverty Point vicinity. Beckman had surface collected the site for a period of years as he awaited an oil well to be brought in; he later collaborated with Webb in analyzing their collection. Finally, a local resident of the site environs, Carl Alexander, committed his large collection to Webb's new interest in the Poverty Point site. Although not an active participant in the field, Webb devoted the early 1950s to the site and its description. These labors culminated in a joint publication with James Ford, *Poverty Point, A Late Archaic Site in Louisiana* (Ford and Webb, *Anthropological Papers* Vol. 46, Pt. 1, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1956), a report Webb later updated in 1977 and again in 1982.

When Webb began thinking of Poverty Point it was as a unique site without known antecedents or relatives. Three decades later he could write "The Extent and Content of Poverty Point Culture" for *American Antiquity* (33:297-321), which demanded wedging this 15-century-long dominating culture into the known and accepted prehistoric framework. It was possible for Clarence to show that the chronological placement for the Poverty Point culture was Late Archaic to Tchefuncte, a position he and Ford had guessed. It now seems reasonable to conclude that those of us belonging to the southeastern archaeological community overlooked the Poverty Point culture because it lacked a ceramic component.

Meanwhile Webb worked with Krieger in refining the reconstruction of Caddo prehistory. He marshaled data that clearly showed the earliest antecedents to be near the beginning of the ninth century, whereas others had argued for the birth of Caddo culture to be five or six centuries later or just barely pre-European. Webb eventually concluded that some of the Caddoan mound-building traits, the tombs, and some of the burial furniture showed Middle American influence. This latter idea is not generally supported by his colleagues.

Between 1935 and 1945 Clarence initiated or completed the excavation of the Gahagan site, Mounds Plantation site, and the Bellevue mound, all major projects. During that same interval he undertook the examination and study of numerous small Caddo sites or middens along the Red River and its tributaries.

We archaeologists often lose sight of the fact that Clarence Webb was a doctor of medicine with a life-absorbing practice in pediatrics. His close friend, H. F. Gregory, anthropologist at Northwestern State University, was correctly quoted as saying, "We accuse him of being an amateur pediatrician and a professional archaeologist" (Gregory quoted in article by John A. Prime in the *Shreveport Times*, January 19, 1991:15, 17).

Webb was indeed active in medical circles. He was a member of 11 medical societies and served as an officer for many of them. Webb also taught on the medical faculties of four universities and served on the staffs of six hospitals. He was elected president of the American Academy of Pediatrics and in 1965 was given the prestigious Grulee Award by that body. The Louisiana State University Medical School created in his name an award for the Outstanding Clinical Instructor of the Year.

Civic, fraternal, religious, and other organizations occupied the obvious slack time in Clarence's life. He was most active in the Rotary Club, locally, nationally, and internationally. In 1960 Centenary College of Shreveport bestowed an honorary LL.D. degree upon him. He served on the commission that wrote the present city charter for the city of Shreveport. In 1987 the Daughters of the American Revolution chose him as one of the "Outstanding Men in America" for his numerous accomplishments.

Clarence was an honored participant in the archaeological societies of Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Mississippi. In 1970 the society was reactivated in Louisiana, and he was chosen as its first president. When that group created the James A. Ford award for "outstanding contributions to Louisiana archaeology" in 1977, it seemed only logical that its first recipient was Dr. Webb. An office for State Archaeologist was established in Louisiana in 1974 and Clarence was the first asked by the governor to serve on its Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission. He was chairman of that commission at the time of his death.

When in 1985 the Society for American Archaeology sought suggestions for its initial Crabtree Award for Avocational Archaeology, a veritable "blizzard" of nominations came for Clarence, to no one's surprise. The SAA did indeed award him this recognition, but it had already bestowed its second-highest honor on Clarence a few years before when he was nominated for president. Although he was not elected to this high office, to be nominated surely can not be a bad second. The SAA and the world of Clarence Webb are diminished by his death.

WILLIAM G. HAAG

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This photograph originally appeared in the 1990 Louisiana State University Medical School Directory, and was provided by Robert W. Neumann, Museum of Anthropology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

<sup>2</sup> A complete bibliography of Clarence Webb's archaeological publications has been prepared by Jon L. Gibson, and appears as "Archaeological Bibliography of Clarence Hungerford Webb, 1939-1979" in *Caddoan and Poverty Point Archaeology: Essays in Honor of Clarence Hungerford Webb* (Louisiana Archaeology 6:51-60, 1980).

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#### ERRATUM

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In the April 1992 issue of the journal (Vol. 57, No. 2), an error was made in the caption for the photograph appearing at the end of the obituary of Albert C. Spaulding (p. 201). The individual in the center of the photograph, identified as Gary Vescecius, is Dan F. Morse. The editors regret any confusion this may have caused.

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