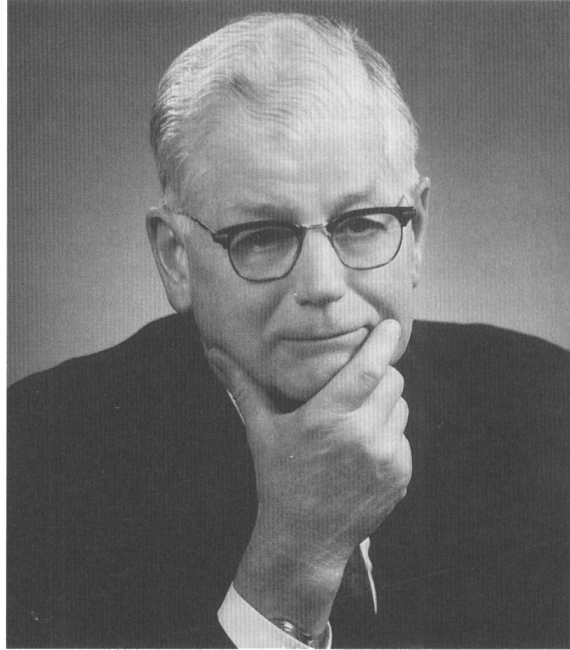


## FREDERICK JOHNSON

1904–1994



**F**rederick Johnson, a long-time Andover, Massachusetts, resident, was born in 1904 to Harry W. and Martina Johnson in Everett, Massachusetts, and passed away August 22, 1994, in a nursing home in Lowell. Few knew of the many accomplishments of this quiet man whose anthropological career spanned more than 70 years. In 1917 one of the grand old men of American anthropology, Frank G. Speck of the University of Pennsylvania, began taking a young boy interested in nature (snakes) on ethnological field trips to the wilds of northern Quebec in days when walking and canoeing were the main means of transportation, the only language was French or a Native American tongue, and their constant companions were Montagnais-Naskapi Indians. Inspired by these early ethnological trips, Johnson entered Tufts College in 1923, studied at the University of Pennsylvania in 1924–1927, and received a B.A. in sociology from Tufts in 1929. Meanwhile, he continued his rugged ethnological fieldwork, summering with the Montagnais-Naskapi near Seven Islands, Quebec, and wintering with them at Point Bleu, Quebec. In 1928 he lived with the Algonquin Indians at Golden (Johnson 1928), Maniwaki, and Bark lakes in the northern Ontario wilderness, and in 1929 he spent the summer with the Ojibwa on Parry Island in Lake Huron (Johnson 1929). His studies of Algonquin-speaking peoples of Canada continued after graduation, under the auspices of the Museum of the American Indian

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(Johnson 1930) in New York. It was then that the anthropological ethic took hold: When you do fieldwork you publish the results or you do no more fieldwork. From the wilds of North Canada, Fred turned to the “green hell” of Panama in 1931, where he served for two years as assistant to Samuel K. Lothrop on the Harvard Peabody Museum’s archaeological expedition to Sitio Conte. In spite of tropical diseases, poisonous snakes, pestilential insects, and often-hostile Indians, the young archaeologist uncovered one of the richest caches of prehistoric gold objects in the New World. On his return to the United States in 1933, Johnson worked at Harvard writing up the Panama materials, doing curatorial work, and taking graduate courses. In the company of Frank H. H. Roberts, he also visited the Yucatan Peninsula where he became involved in Carnegie Foundation research on the ancient Maya; at this time he became very critical of the multidisciplinary approach. Perhaps the most important event of this period, however, was his marriage to Dorothy Murfitt, his constant companion until her death in 1984.

In 1936 Douglas S. Byers, the newly appointed director of the Robert S. Peabody Foundation for Archaeology (now the Robert S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology) at the Phillips Academy in Andover, named Johnson curator, and between them they built the Andover Foundation into the small, high-quality institution it is today. During this period, Johnson’s early interest in research also flowered. He became a pioneer in developing modern interdisciplinary studies when in 1939 he organized some 15 scientists in various fields into a cooperative group to study the archaeological remains recovered from the excavation of a 4,000-year-old fishweir under Boylston Street in downtown Boston.

In Fred’s mind, this was a new, more fruitful approach—a group of scientists from many disciplines focusing on a specific problem—in this case, how humans changed the environment in the Boylston Street area. This was in contrast to the multidisciplinary approach of A. V. Kidder of the Carnegie Foundation, in which scientists from different fields each worked on his or her own interest. The Boston group consisted of nine scientists reconstructing the blue-clay environment encasing wood stakes of a fishweir: William Clench (mollusks), Thurlow C. Nelson (oysters), David H. Linder and Paul Conger (diatoms), Irving W. Bailey and Elso S. Barghoorn (the wood of the stakes), William S. Benninghoff and Arthur S. Knox (associated pollen), Sheldon Judson (Pleistocene stratigraphy and geology), and Fred Phleger (foraminifera). Johnson’s approach was a major breakthrough in American archaeology. It was more complex than the multidisciplinary approach; in addition to stimulating a number of new studies, numerous conferences and work sessions led the participants to understand one another’s approach to a problem, and encouraged them to experiment with different methodologies. Here, in Fred’s mind, was the real value of this new approach—it gave not just more information, but new information. From 1934 to 1942, Fred acted not only as the organizer of this group, but as fundraiser and liaison with Boston business executives and politicians.

Besides this major accomplishment, Fred encouraged Doug Byers to begin an archaeological investigation program using Phillips Academy students and others in a series of summer school projects in New England. They dug two sites on Martha’s Vineyard, several others on Cape Cod and in southeastern Massachusetts, as well as a series of stratified shell mounds (Taft’s Point, Waterside, and Nevin) near Blue Hill on the coast of Maine. Although Byers was the head of these expeditions, it was Fred Johnson who took the notes, drew the profiles, ran the digs, and trained the “boys.” The result was that New England archaeology advanced as it never had before and, as Dorothy Murfitt once said, “came of age.” During this period I visited Fred and first learned of interdisciplinary archaeology over a sun-downer in front of his fireplace in the living room of the colonial house he had reconstructed.

Fred’s next major interdisciplinary endeavor came when he and Hugh Raup, a world-famous botanist, organized the Andover-Harvard Yukon Expedition in 1944 and 1948 to do investigations along the Alcan Highway in eastern British Columbia, the southern Yukon, and nearby Alaska. In addition to Raup, Fred worked with Aeles E. Porslid, botanist Charles H. D. Clarke, and geologists William H. Druvy and Edward D. Kindle, all from Canada. It was a pleasure to learn from Fred; from 1957 through 1962 I worked in the same area of the southern Yukon for the National Museum of Canada and had the pleasure in the 1960s of analyzing and publishing the results of those endeavors under Fred’s tutelage.

These interdisciplinary endeavors caught the attention of Willard Libby, who was then the youngest full professor at the University of Chicago and formerly had worked for the then-secret Atomic Energy Commission. After a brief phone conversation in which Libby explained what he was doing with  $^{14}\text{C}$  and its potential for archaeology, Libby decided Fred was just the man to be his liaison with the archaeological field. In fact, they became great pals both over the phone and during Libby's visits to Fred's home in Andover. As might be expected, Fred contacted many of his archaeological colleagues to tell them about radiocarbon dating, obtained from them carbon samples for dating, and organized a recording system. Somewhat to his surprise, this new dating technique met with considerable resistance from many of his senior colleagues; however, this initial reluctance vanished as the dates began to come in, more conferences were held, and Fred introduced Libby to the archaeologists. Once again, Fred's little office on the second floor of the Peabody Foundation in Andover became the hub of an important advance in American archaeology. His leadership in the field of radiocarbon dating continued all through the 1950s and well into the 1960s.

In the 1960s Fred's behind-the-scenes activities really reached fruition when (with the aid of Doug Byers and John Kemper, headmaster of Phillips Academy) he decided to sponsor the Tehuacán Archaeological-Botanical Project, directed by myself, with the objective of discovering the origin of corn agriculture in Mexico. By this time Fred met regularly with Joe Brew and Emil Haury at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C., and their efforts helped promote federal archaeology. The Committee for the Recovery of Archeological Remains flourished, and Fred acted as adviser to the National Science Foundation. During this time the Peabody Foundation obtained grant after grant for the project in Tehuacán, both for fieldwork—including Fred's on-the-spot handling of radiocarbon samples—and for the preparation of the resulting reports, published in five volumes. When Doug Byers retired in 1967, Fred Johnson served as director for a year and was instrumental in my selection as the foundation's next director. Fred retired from the Robert S. Peabody Museum in 1969.

In the 1960s Fred also served behind the scenes at Tufts University, his alma mater, responding to its request to help choose a president and resurrect the library. He was awarded Tufts honorary doctor of science in 1966. Fred was awarded other medals and honors from the Department of the Interior and the American Anthropological Association. Fred was president of the Society for American Archaeology (1947–1948) and later received its Distinguished Service Award. From 1949 to 1954 he was executive secretary of the American Anthropological Association. During the same time, Fred served as an archaeological adviser to the Peabody Museum in Salem. In retirement he also established a cruising club, pursuing a hobby of which he seldom spoke—sailing. This avocation was a joy to him and Dorothy for all their lives together. Since his youth in Everett, Fred had loved boats and boat building, having built and sailed a series of boats in the 1940s and 1950s. His boat building culminated in the 40-foot *Shaup*, created in his backyard in Andover and launched in Manchester, where Fred was a sailor, adviser, harbormaster, and commodore. Fred was far more than a weekend dilettante; he sailed in the Bermuda Cup across the Atlantic and, with Doug Byers, rode out hurricane Hazel in the Bay of Fundy! Like his other hobby, skilled cabinet making, sailing never interfered with his continuing archaeological activities.

Even in retirement, Fred's interest in archaeology never waned. In 1974 he established the Andover Foundation for Archaeological Research (AFAR) to assist the Robert S. Peabody Museum with its far-flung field projects. After 1981 I continued Fred's tradition of interdisciplinary research, directing projects in Belize, New England, the Southwest, Polynesia, and China. Fred not only served as president of AFAR, he saw that it was incorporated, worked to establish its nonprofit status, provided it with a headquarters in his boat-building basement, and at the end of the day in his "sundowner" club upstairs, gave sage advice. Although his health began to fail, Fred's contributions carried on into the 1990s.

Fred was my close friend and mentor, an innovative archaeologist and anthropologist—although little recognized by the profession—and a great human being. Whence will come another such as he?

RICHARD S. MACNEISH

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