

Robert Fleming Heizer, Anthropology: Berkeley

1915-1979

Professor Emeritus

Robert Fleming **Heizer** was born in Denver on July 13, 1915, and died in Berkeley on July 16, 1979. During all but six of his adult years he was associated with the University at Berkeley: 1934-41, as an undergraduate and graduate student; 1947-77 as instructor, assistant, associate, and full professor; and 1977-79, as professor, emeritus. After taking early retirement in 1977 for personal reasons, he continued to teach one course a year, the last time in the spring quarter of the year he died.

Few Berkeley alumni, and few of its professors, have had such distinguished careers, or have contributed so much to the University. Bob's scientific production was prodigious: author, co-author, or editor of 24 books and nearly 400 scientific articles on a broad range of subjects such as aboriginal whaling in the Pacific (his dissertation), the Hopi snake dance, the ethnography and history of the California Indians, and the sad lot of minority populations in California under Spanish, Mexican, and American domination. He was, of course, known above all for his archaeological research and writing on Western North American and Mesoamerican topics.

Bob's broad range of interests is explained primarily by an insatiable curiosity, and secondarily by the kind of training he received at Berkeley under Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, and Edward Gifford. Prior to World War II anthropology was a unitary discipline, and all doctoral candidates were expected to be acquainted with its major branches: cultural anthropology and ethnography, archaeology and prehistory, physical anthropology, and linguistics. The combination of basic intellect, curiosity, and broad training produced one of American's last "general" anthropologists who could talk and write knowledgeably in areas of the discipline far transcending his primary passion, archaeology.

In this latter field Bob excavated or otherwise engaged in archaeological research in California, Nevada, Alaska, Mexico, Guatemala, and Egypt. His work was always marked by great attention to detail, the recognition that archaeological facts are but parts of wider cultural systems into which they must be fitted, the early use of new methods and techniques not primarily archaeological (e.g., X-ray fluorescence and neutron activation analysis), and collaborative research with colleagues in other fields, especially Sherburne Cook (population and nutritional studies), Howell Williams (ancient heavy transport and the source of massive archaeological stones) and Fred Stross (chemical analysis of archeological remains). Among the scientific contributions for which Bob will be best remembered are his findings at Lovelock Cave in Nevada, his excavations in the Sacramento delta, his discoveries at the Olmec site of La Venta in Tabasco, Mexico, and his research leading to the discovery of the quarries from which the stone for the Colossi of Memnon in Egypt had come. But no brief list can begin to do justice to the remarkable range of topics to which Bob made major scientific contributions.

Bob's scientific achievements were recognized in many ways: Guggenheim fellowships (twice), fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, many grants from the National Science Foundation and the National Geographic Society (which underwrote his research in Mexico, Guatemala, and Egypt), an honorary Sc.D. from the University of Nevada, and election to the National Academy of Sciences in 1973.

Bob's ability and success as a teacher can be gauged by the large enrollments in his undergraduate courses, and by the number of professional archaeologists trained by him who are now teaching or engaged in research at universities and other institutions throughout the country.

To some extent, Bob was a lone, work-addicted man whose prodigious production required rigid self-discipline. Yet he could be extremely witty and good company. His many friends remember him for his wry and often sardonic humor, for his willingness to share his knowledge and ideas with them, for the magnitude and depth of his scholarship, and for the stimulus that he gave to anthropology in general.

He is survived by two sons, Michael and Stephen, a daughter, Sydney, and one grandson.

J. Desmond Clark
George M. Foster
David G. Mandelbaum