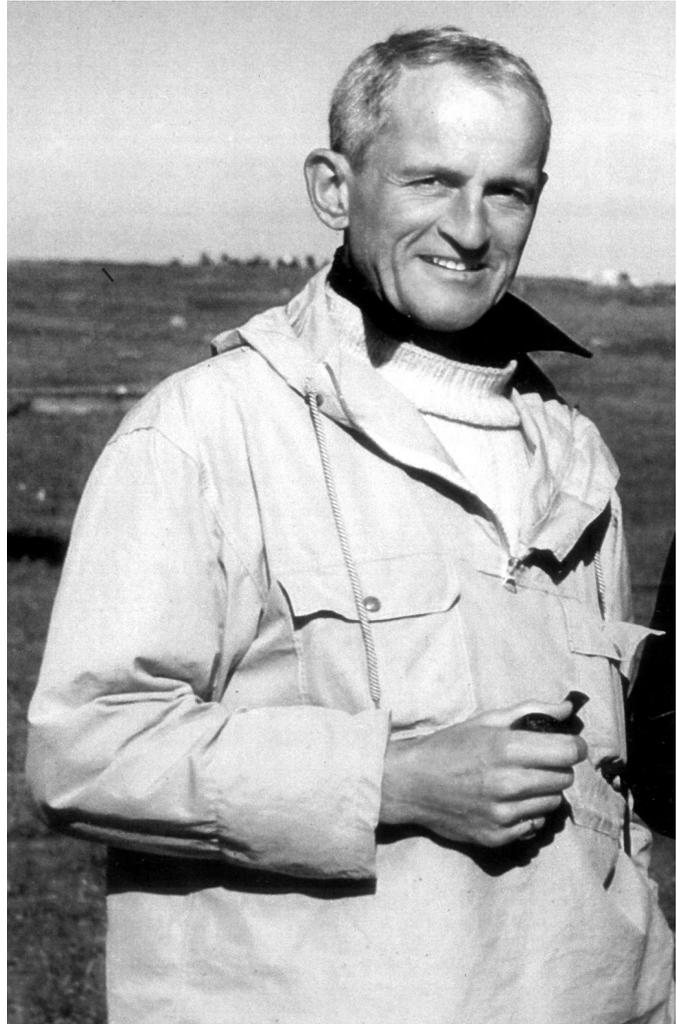


ELMER HARP JR. (1913–2009)

Elmer Harp Jr., 96, a Dartmouth College anthropologist who inspired many undergraduates to a career in Arctic archaeology and established the Alaskan roots of Eastern Arctic Dorset culture, died in Hanover, New Hampshire, on 2 June 2009. During the last year of his life, he suffered mild dementia, but he never lost the twinkle in his eye or his bone-crushing handshake. He is survived by his wife, Elaine, his daughter, Vicky Drucker, and three sons, Jack, Geoffrey, and Douglas. Harp taught at Dartmouth throughout his long career, co-founding the Department of Anthropology in 1963 with northern ethnologist Robert McKennan.

Harp was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on 13 April 1913, and had his first brush with anthropology as a sophomore at Harvard, finding it “exciting” and full of “adventure.” When the Depression interrupted his academic training he took courses in engineering at the Case School of Applied Science in Cleveland before returning to Harvard, where he graduated in anthropology in 1938. That summer he gained his first taste of northern fieldwork assisting a Harvard graduate student on his geology expedition in Montana. He then worked for several years as an efficiency engineer at the Lincoln Electric Company, managing the hand tool storeroom with such distinction, he told me with mock flourish, that he received high commendation. When World War II broke out, his engineering, management, and boating experience paved the way for U.S. Navy PT boat duty, first in the Mediterranean and then in the southwest Pacific. Returning to Harvard after the war, he completed an MA in 1947 and took an appointment as Curator of Anthropology at the Dartmouth College Museum in Hanover. That summer he did his first archaeological fieldwork in southeastern Massachusetts as an assistant to Frederick Johnson of the Robert S. Peabody Foundation (RSPF) at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. The following year, he began archaeological work in the Upper Connecticut Valley and that summer joined Johnson as field assistant on an RSPF project in the Yukon Territory, exploring one of the potential early Indian and Eskimo migration routes into the Canadian Arctic and Lower 48.

In 1949, Dartmouth’s geographer, David C. (Beanie) Nutt, was exploring the oceanography of the Labrador coast and invited Harp to conduct archaeological studies of a region that had become embroiled in the debate about whether Eskimo culture had originated in Central Canada or near the Bering Strait. William Duncan Strong’s work in Labrador in 1927–28 had revealed a third alternative suggested by an “Old Stone Culture” of Labrador that shared ulus and other artifact types with early Eskimos and Northeastern Indians. Suddenly Labrador—which had been seen as the eastern terminus of an Eskimo *drang nach osten* (“drive toward the east”), as Harp memorably phrased it—became a third possible source. Researchers were then beginning to settle on Thule origins in the Western Arctic, but the source of the Eastern Arctic Dorset culture and



Elmer Harp Jr. at Baker Lake in 1958.

“racial type” remained contentious. Labrador had become central to questions about how many Eskimo cultures existed, where they originated, and whether they had been influenced by Subarctic Indians or Siberian groups. These issues became Harp’s passion and lifelong research agenda.

Nutt’s *Blue Dolphin* schooner was a perfect platform for researching the roadless coasts of northern Newfoundland and Labrador. In 1949–50, accompanied by Dartmouth geology student Stearns (Tony) Morse, Harp surveyed the coves and raised beaches along the Strait of Belle Isle, finding Indian sites similar to Strong’s “Old Stone Culture,” but nothing related to recent or ancient Eskimos. Charcoal samples from some of the highest Archaic Indian sites produced some of the first—and earliest—dates from the Far Northeast, 6000 years. These surveys became the backbone for his “Boreal Archaic” culture paper (Harp, 1963) that provided the first chronology for prehistoric Indian cultures north of the St. Lawrence. Among them was an early tradition later known as the Maritime Archaic, which was distinguished by its elaborate burial ritual and ground and

polished stone tools. Because most of these collections were from deflated surface sites, they revealed few clues about habitations or social context. Harp's work in the village of Port au Choix in western Newfoundland provided the first glimpse of the dramatic Maritime Archaic burial site discoveries later made there by James Tuck.

While searching for early traces of Beothuk Indians in northern Newfoundland in 1949, Harp visited the previously known Phillips Garden Dorset site at Port au Choix. In 1950 he returned and discovered its well-preserved dwellings containing chert, bone, and ivory tools and ornaments. These excavations formed the core of his Harvard PhD dissertation, in which he identified the intrusive nature of Newfoundland Dorset and linked its origins to the Central Canadian Arctic and ultimately to Alaska (Harp, 1964). From 1961 to 1963 Harp returned to conduct extensive excavations and later published papers on Dorset technology, art, settlement patterns (Harp, 1976), and demography. He was one of the first to argue for the conservative nature of Dorset culture, as seen in the adaptations, technology, and tool styles, which varied little through time and space from the Central Arctic to Subarctic Newfoundland. Contrary to Strong's views, Harp saw no evidence of Indian contact or influence in Newfoundland Dorset culture. In addition, his analysis with David Hughes (Harp and Hughes, 1968) of a small sample of Dorset human remains from a burial cave at Gargamelle Cove in Port au Choix was one of the first reports to identify Dorset biological ancestry as Eskimo rather than Indian.

Harp began his association with Dartmouth in 1947, serving first as associate curator at the College Museum, and beginning in 1950 as an anthropology instructor in the Sociology Department. In 1952–54, when he returned to Harvard as a special student to complete his PhD on his Labrador and Newfoundland work, he also took Russian language and area study courses. His growing circumpolar perspective was further strengthened by a year (1959–60) as a Fulbright Senior Fellow at the National Museum of Denmark, which was still staffed by the Fifth Thule expedition grand masters, Therkel Mathiassen and Kai Birket-Smith. They lunched daily on tea and smørrebrød with students, younger curators like Helge Larsen and Jørgen Meldgaard, and “visiting firemen” like Harp. Several years later, Harp traveled to international meetings in Moscow, where he met Soviet anthropologists, and made a memorable trip to Tashkent and Samarkand. Meanwhile, he became Chair of Dartmouth's new Anthropology Program and in 1961, with help from McKennan, created an independent major and Department of Anthropology, which he chaired in 1961–72 and 1975–76, while also directing the museum from 1961 to 1968. For two decades, Harp was the driving force behind anthropology at Dartmouth, and during these years he produced many students who went on to professions in anthropology and Arctic archaeology, a unique achievement for an undergraduate college. Harp retired in 1978 but remained active, teaching a few courses and continuing his research and writing until 2004.

Throughout his career Harp received unstinting support from two women. The first was his wife, Elaine, who mothered scores of students each year and presided over annual Harp-fests in their home where Elmer's homebrew took center stage. Elaine participated in her husband's career in other ways, as cook and caring friend to packs of student diggers on his Port au Choix expeditions, as a vibrant companion who added spunk to international conference gatherings, and as counselor and adjutant whose crack memory and wit made her central to the Harp social scene. The second grande dame—this time on the academic side—was Mary E. Wesbrook, who joined the Dartmouth faculty in 1948 as secretary to the Sociology Department and later managed the evolving anthropology program and department. Wesbrook remained in that position until 1979, producing 17 issues of her annual Dartmouth Anthropology Notes recounting the lives and times of the growing department and its faculty, students, and graduates. As Harp noted, “Wesbrook was more than a sterling administrative assistant. She was from the very beginning a surrogate parent to our students, as well as a fundamental asset and most loyal supporter of evolving anthropology at Dartmouth.”

Harp's fieldwork had shifted from the Eastern to the Central Canadian Arctic in the 1950s, in response to lingering questions about southern (i.e., Indian) influence on Dorset culture. In 1955, aided by Dartmouth medical school pathologist and amateur pilot Dr. Ralph Miller, Harp conducted an airborne survey of the shores of Coronation Gulf where he searched for Eskimo connections between the Eastern and Western Arctic. This project, building upon Frederick Johnson's earlier use of aerial photography in the Yukon, initiated Harp's interest in aerial survey techniques and resulted in small collections, but no major discoveries of Eskimo migrations. A second foray in 1958 took Harp and Robert McKennan to the Thelon River and Central Baren Grounds west of Hudson Bay, searching for evidence of the inland caribou-hunting proto-Eskimos theorized by Boas and Birket-Smith (Harp, 1961). Their finds revealed ancient Indian occupations of this forest-tundra ecotone but no evidence of early Eskimo cultures prior to the ethnographic Caribou Eskimo. By this time it was clear that the Thule and Dorset (Paleoeskimo) traditions had Western Arctic origins.

Although primarily a teacher and research archaeologist, Harp participated in several early contracting and consulting projects. The most important of these was oversight from 1961 to 1971 of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline archaeology for the Department of the Interior, conducted in collaboration with Robert McKennan. Their recommendations shaped the design and management of this mammoth enterprise and became the foundation for the new field of cultural resource management in Alaska.

For his final field project, Harp turned to another unknown region—the forest-tundra boundary and islands of Eastern Hudson Bay. In four elaborately planned field seasons—two along the mainland coast and two among the Belcher Islands—he discovered large numbers of Pre-

Dorset and Dorset sites spanning 3000 years, together with detailed information on settlement patterns (Harp, 1997), house types, and archaeometry. Once again, Dorset culture was seen to be conservative in its stylistic development, but here (in contrast to Labrador and the Central Barren Grounds) little evidence of Indian cultures was found, and—not surprisingly—none in the Belchers. These expeditions, with large crews traveling in motor-powered freight canoes, were difficult and dangerous, but Harp carried them out safely and efficiently, with the assistance of Dr. Jack Rinker of the U.S. Army Cold Regions Laboratory in Hanover.

Harp's long-standing interest in aerial photography became an integral component of his Hudson Bay survey. To help research this previously unknown region, Harp enlisted Rinker, an expert environmental scientist and air photo interpreter, to help develop methods of air photo interpretation that could recognize the faint archaeological signatures of sites left on tundra soils and vegetation. With NSF support, Harp had custom-flown air photo coverage for the survey region that produced photos in a variety of scales and emulsions, and he set up detailed protocols of environmental analysis to detect cultural modifications to be tested in the field. Harp's applications of aerial photography had a wide impact on socio-cultural anthropology as well as on archaeology but failed to become a standard tool, in those "pre-Google Earth" days, because of the cost of obtaining suitable imagery.

Although Harp's field activities ended with the Belcher Island project, his research continued. He broke new ground with his paper on Dorset site settlement patterns and radiocarbon dates comparing demographic reconstructions between Phillips Garden and the Belcher Islands Dorset sites, and he produced an important summary of Arctic and Subarctic prehistory. A Smithsonian Handbook paper documented the history of Eastern Arctic archaeology. His final major work, *Lives and Landscapes* (Harp, 2003), edited by Priscilla Renouf, was a photo-essay book on Port au Choix. It describes the life of Newfoundland out-port culture that Harp documented in writing and photography with his trusty Leica camera between 1948 and 1963. Here and in his illustrated 1948 diary, *North to the Yukon* (2005), he revealed his talent for artful portraiture and sensitive description. In 1993, the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center organized a festschrift, *Honoring Our Elders: A History of Eastern Arctic Archaeology*, on the occasion of Harp's 80th birthday. It happened that this year Graham Rowley and Father Guy Marie-Rousselière were also 80, and Frederica DeLaguna was 90. The ensuing publication (Fitzhugh et al., 2002) marked a major turning point with the retirement of the old pioneers and culture history paradigms and the emergence of indigenous archaeology.

In 1997, the Harps were invited back to Port au Choix on the occasion of the opening of a new Port au Choix National Historic Site Visitors' Centre that featured the discoveries Harp, James Tuck, and Priscilla Renouf had made there. In 2004, following publication of *Lives and Landscapes*, Elmer

received an honorary degree from Memorial University for his pioneering research in Newfoundland and Labrador. These visits had the trappings of a hero's homecoming, for the Harps were loved by Newfoundlanders just as they were treasured by their friends, students, and colleagues. Harp will forever be remembered as the quintessential gentleman scholar of Dartmouth whose generous qualities as teacher, mentor, and friend of circumpolar anthropologists and northern people will be nearly as lasting as his contributions to Eastern Arctic archaeology.

## REFERENCES

- Fitzhugh, W.W. 2002. Elmer Harp, Jr., Dartmouth's Dorset pioneer: A personal reflection. In: Fitzhugh, W., Loring, S., and Odess, D., eds. *Honoring our elders: A history of Eastern Arctic archaeology*. Contributions to Circumpolar Anthropology 2. Washington, D.C.: Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution. xiii–xv.
- Harp, E., Jr. 1961. *The archaeology of the Lower and Middle Thelon, Northwest Territories*. Technical Paper No. 8. Montreal: Arctic Institute of North America.
- . 1963. Evidence of Boreal Archaic culture in southern Labrador and Newfoundland. Bulletin No. 193, Contributions to Anthropology 1961–1962, Part I, Paper No. 5. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada. 184–261.
- . 1964. The cultural affinities of the Newfoundland Dorset Eskimos. Bulletin 200, Anthropological Series No. 67. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada.
- . 1976. Dorset settlement patterns in Newfoundland and southeastern Hudson Bay. In: Maxwell, M.S., ed. *Eastern Arctic prehistory: Paleoeskimo problems*. *Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology* 31. 119–138.
- . 1997. Pioneer settlements of the Belcher Islands, N.W.T. In: Gilberg, R., and Gulløv, H.C., eds. *Fifty years of Arctic research: Anthropological studies from Greenland to Siberia*. Ethnographical Series 18. Copenhagen: Department of Ethnography, National Museum of Denmark. 157–168.
- . 2003. *Lives and landscapes: A photographic memoir of outport Newfoundland and Labrador, 1949–1963*. Edited with an introduction by M.A.P. Renouf. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.
- . 2005. *North to the Yukon Territory via the Alcan Highway in 1948: Field notes of the Andover-Harvard Expedition*. Whitehorse, Yukon: Yukon Tourism and Culture, Archaeology Programme.
- Harp, E., Jr., and Hughes, D.R. 1968. Five prehistoric burials from Port au Choix, Newfoundland. *Polar Notes* 8:1–47.

*William W. Fitzhugh*  
*Arctic Studies Center*  
*National Museum of Natural History*  
*Smithsonian Institution*  
*PO Box 37012*  
*Washington, D.C. 20013-7012*  
*Fitzhugh@si.edu*