

NECROLOGY
KARL SCHMITT
1915-1952

On August 6, 1952, Dr. Karl Schmitt was killed when his car was struck by a train at Magdalena, New Mexico. Karl and his family were on their customary vacation in the Southwest when the accident occurred. His death is a great loss, not only to his colleagues and many friends, but to the field of anthropology; and this loss is amplified by the quality of research, teaching and writing Karl did accomplish during his lifetime. One feels an uncommonly great distress in being unable to witness a complete fruition of his career.

Karl was born in Albany, New York on December 20, 1915, but spent the greater part of his boyhood in Washington, D. C. He was a graduate of William McKinley High School in Washington and soon entered George Washington University. In 1938, Karl received his Bachelor of Science degree in the field of geology, an asset which undoubtedly is partly responsible for his careful methods and critical observation in field archaeology.

During the summer of 1938, he participated in archaeological work being conducted by the U. S. National Museum in western Missouri. In the fall, he entered the University of Chicago where all efforts were spent in gaining a knowledge of anthropology. Throughout the next two and one-half years, Karl spent the time either studying at the University or in the field. A second season with the U. S. National Museum excavation party was spent in eastern Kansas. In 1939, he dug at the prehistoric Kincaid site in southern Illinois and in 1940 he shifted his attention to the eastern seaboard. During this latter period, he conducted archaeological work for the Broome County Historical Society at Castle Creek in New York, and at Potomac Creek, Virginia for the U. S. National Museum. Some of this later fieldwork was utilized for his Master's thesis at the University of Chicago.

In March, 1941, Karl began a year of service as archaeologist for the National Park Service at Ocmulgee National Monument, Macon, Georgia. This archaeological work in the southeast further widened his experience. In August, 1941, he married Miss Iva Osanai, a student of anthropology at the University, and in the spring of 1942 he returned to Chicago to complete and receive his Master of Arts degree in anthropology.

Karl entered the army as an Aviation Cadet in 1942, whereupon he was sent back to the University of Chicago for training as a weather observer. After receiving a "Certificate of Professional Competence in Meteorology," he was commissioned Second Lieutenant as an Air Corps Weather Officer and soon rose to the rank of Captain. The following three years were spent in establishing or operating weather stations both in the United States and the Southwest Pacific. While overseas, Karl visited various localities in the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines where he also gathered anthropological data. This first hand acquaintance with the Pacific stimulated his interest in both ethnology and social anthropology. At the close of World War II, Karl was released as a Major in the reserve on inactive status.

At this time, Karl returned to graduate work at the University of Chicago where he was awarded a Teaching Assistantship. Throughout the year he

completed all of his requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in anthropology, and the degree was conferred in late 1947. His Ph. D. dissertation incorporated much of his earlier work on the Atlantic coast into a broader study entitled "Archaeological Chronology of the Middle Atlantic States."

In September, 1947, Karl accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma where he remained until the time of his death. Karl was attracted to Oklahoma primarily because the state offered so many opportunities for fieldwork. In addition, he was becoming more and more interested in the Great Plains, and Oklahoma seemed ideal for continued research on this area. During his five years at the University of Oklahoma, Karl spent his entire time in teaching, advising students, fieldwork among the Indians, working in the laboratory or writing reports. He allowed little time for hobbies or social affairs for these other activities were too demanding of his attention.

Karl's chief contributions, aside from his influence upon students, are in the fields of archaeology and ethnology. As an archaeologist, he had broad experience both working in the field and in analyzing materials in the laboratory. His reports on the archaeology of the Middle Atlantic States and prehistoric sites in the Washita River valley of Oklahoma are important contributions. Karl was deeply interested in historic or proto-historic archaeology and felt the need for a much greater overlap in understanding between archaeology and ethnology. He frequently expressed the opinion that archaeology was too much an inventory of artifacts or "trait lists" and commonly chided his colleagues for not making a greater effort to inject the human element into prehistory.

The Indians in Oklahoma offered a great attraction for Karl, and he soon became their student and sincere friend. He spent every summer in gathering fieldnotes or recording and writing up data. He initiated his work with the Wichita but soon became the friend of the Caddo, Creek, Shawnee, Pawnee, Quapaw, and many other groups. Karl maintained excellent rapport and received the respect of Indian peoples throughout the entire state. He was a welcome guest at tribal "pow-wows" and intimate family gatherings.

Karl was a long time member and contributor to several professional societies including the American Anthropological Association, Society for American Archaeology, American Association for the Advancement of Science and Sigma Xi. In recent years, he had become an active member of the Texas Archaeological and Paleontological Society and the Oklahoma Historical Society and had contributed several useful reports for their journals.¹ Just prior to his death, Karl had the pleasure of seeing his first major work on the Wichita Indians off the press. In mid-summer, the report entitled "Wichita Kinship: Past and Present," written by Karl and his wife, Iva, was printed and ready for distribution.

He was one of the prime instigators in the formation of the Oklahoma Anthropological Society, established for the benefit of anyone interested in Indians, whether amateur or professional, and he served as Secretary-Treasurer throughout the early months of its existence. Karl was a familiar individual at national and regional gatherings of anthropologists and usually presented a paper or report on his current research or ideas. His smile, his easy friendship and his enthusiasm always made such conferences more enjoyable.

At the University of Oklahoma, within the past year, Karl had received a promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor and was appointed as Curator of Ethnology for the University Museum. He was to

¹ See Bibliography attached.

become Chairman of the Department of Anthropology, serving a four year term starting in the fall of 1952. His extensive research on the Wichita was largely completed and he had just undertaken a comparative study on Central Siouan social organization. The accident which took Karl's life has not only deprived us of a sincere and esteemed friendship, but it has terminated the career of a vital personality as it was growing and approaching a climax.

—Robert E. Bell

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