

James Vallière Wright 1932-2004

James Vallière Wright, one of Canada's most eminent archaeologists, died on Sunday of cancer at Kemptville, Ontario, age 72. "Big Jim" or "Gentle Jim" as he was affectionately known by close colleagues was born and raised in Toronto. He took his early education at Runnymede Collegiate Institute where he met his future wife, Dawn Downey. They were married in 1961. Jim obtained his B.A. (1956) and M.A. (1957) at the University of Toronto, and his Ph.D. (1964) at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He joined the National Museum of Canada in 1960 (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) where he worked until his retirement in 1991. During his museum career, Wright held positions as Curator of Ontario Archaeology, Head of the Eastern Canada Section, Head of the Scientific Division, Chief of the Division, and Senior Scientist. After retirement, he was appointed curator emeritus and remained active in that capacity almost until his death.

Beginning in the 1950s, Jim's field and university experience brought him into contact with some of the leading archaeologists of the time, people such as J. Norman Emerson, Thomas Lee, David Baerreis, Chester Chard, William Ritchie, Richard "Scotty" MacNeish, and Henry Collins. These contacts gave him opportunities to expand his research interests across Ontario into the United States and even into the Canadian Arctic. During the 1960s and 1970s, his explorations continued in Ontario, with alternate years spent in northern and southern parts of the province or between Ontario and other provinces. By the 1970s, he had undertaken pioneering archaeological surveys and excavations in Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the Northwest territories, mainly in forest and tundra regions and all related to the ancient history of Canada's native peoples.

Wright was a prolific writer who believed that archaeological discoveries should be made available not only to other archaeologists but to all interested people. He published dozens of scientific books and articles, among them such titles as: *A Regional Examination of Ojibwa Culture History* (1965), *The Ontario Iroquois Tradition* (1966), *Cree Culture History in the Southern Indian Lake Region* (1968), *The Aberdeen Site, Keewatin District, N.W.T.* (1972), *The Prehistory of Lake Athabasca* (1975), *Mapping Canada's Prehistory* (1986), and *The Prehistoric Transportation of Goods in the St. Lawrence River Basin* (1994). He also wrote many items aimed at a more general readership, such as *Ontario Prehistory / La préhistoire de l'Ontario* (1972, 1981), *Six Chapters of Canada's Prehistory / Visages de la préhistoire du Canada* (1976, 1981), and *Quebec Prehistory / La préhistoire du Québec* (1979, 1980). His largest project, the three-volume "A History of the Native People of Canada" (1995, 1999, 2004), was nearly complete by the time of his death and has been acclaimed as a masterpiece. No other archaeologist would have been capable of attempting such a monumental task, let alone carrying it so far so successfully.

During the course of his career, Jim Wright was an avid promoter of Canadian archaeology. He believed that “the past record of humanity has a universal appeal which overrides more parochial concerns such as whether the archaeological evidence is directly related to one’s immediate ancestors” and that only the archaeological record “can extend the historical time depth of human occupation of a region many thousands of years back into the past.” An early member of the Ontario Archaeological Society, he was also the Founding President of the Canadian Archaeological Association, a member of the London Museum of Archaeology Board of Trustees, a co-director of A.H.B.I. Associates, and a member of many other archaeological, anthropological, historical, scientific and consultative organizations in Canada and abroad. On various occasions he either taught at or supervised students at the universities of Montreal, Toronto and Trent. He mentored dozens of students and colleagues who came to study at the museum and he spoke regularly to reporters, archaeological associations, schools, and universities across the country.

Wright gave many years of outstanding scholarship to Canadians. He made a long list of contributions, reflecting a deep interest in local questions, but always situated within a broader context. In return, his achievements received wide recognition: the Centennial Medal (1967), fellowship in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1969), the Queen’s Jubilee Medal (1967), fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada (1980), membership on the Editorial Board of the Historical Atlas of Canada (1979-1987), fellowship of Sigma XI (1988), the Smith-Wintemberg Award (1992), honorary lifetime membership in the Canadian Archaeological Association (1992), a festschrift of essays written in his honour (1993), and the Ridley Lecture (1996 - the Ontario Archaeological Society’s highest award for professional archaeologists).

Jim Wright was predeceased by his mother Joyce Marie (Vallier) Wright of Toronto, his father Milton John Wright of Fort William and Toronto, and his older brother Milton John Wright (Elizabeth) of Lakefield. He is survived by his wife Dawn, their daughter Joyce Marie, both of South Mountain, Ontario, his sister Joyce Marie of Hawkestone, Ontario, his brother Philip (Maxine) of Orlando, Florida, and two nephews, Milton John (Jean) of Sooke, British Columbia and James Brian (Elizabeth) of Guelph, Ontario.

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(Author’s title given as of the time of writing)