



ELMER RICHARD SMITH

1909–1960

In 1950 Elmer R. Smith wrote a history of Utah anthropology, in which he charted the cycles of surge and ebb that began with Byron Cummings' pioneer work in 1895. The interesting thing about this history was that Smith had been a part of all the cycles, except this earliest one with Cummings. Following Cummings at Utah such men as Neil Judd, Andrew Kerr, Julian Steward, and John Gillin, did outstanding research in both archaeology and ethnology. Elmer Smith was a product of the teachings and influence of all these men. As a boy he had met Judd; as a young man and a student he worked with Kerr, Steward, and Gillin. With this training and stimulation, plus his own vitality and zest for life—and enthusiasm for anthropology, which for him was a complete intellectual and emotional fulfillment — it is no wonder that he contributed significantly, personally, to the progress of anthropology in the West.

Aside from developing ethnological interests, Smith conducted an archaeological survey over most of western and southern Utah during the 1930's. As early as 1934 he excavated the now well-known Shonesburg ruin in Zion National Park.

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Later his excellent work at Deadman's Cave near Magna, Utah, established a valid sequence of desert-culture artifact forms which has been a guide to subsequent work. He also correctly correlated the Cave's history with a late stillstand of Lake Bonneville. Later, in 1940 and 1941, he located and sampled many of the ancient caves near Wendover which were later studied by others at the University of Utah.

All during this period of archaeological field work and research, which he enjoyed tremendously, he also taught heavy loads in both sociology and anthropology. In fact, he was first and last the teacher. In his 23 years at the University of Utah he passed on to thousands of students his enthusiasm, which bordered at times upon the evangelical, for anthropology and the insights it held for young Utahns. For the past six or eight years his classes have been filled with the children of his earlier students. He was not a Mormon; he was an outspoken critic of the philosophy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, because many LDS beliefs seemed to him to run counter to scientific anthropological findings.

Most of his students know him not at all as an archaeologist, although he had done much archaeological work and had started the archaeological careers of such students as Arden King, Carling Malouf, and William Mulloy. Most knew him as an arch-champion of minority groups. This interest grew out of service as a

community analyst, beginning in 1944, with the War Relocation Authority in Idaho. As a result of this service, he has been identified for the past fifteen years with problems in race relations, interdisciplinary projects, and applied anthropology. He was respected and valued by the university community as a courageous, inspirational teacher. Although born in Idaho (St. Anthony, January 28, 1909), Smith was educated at the University of Utah, receiving his B.Sc. in 1931 and the M.Sc. in 1932. He later did graduate study at the University of California in 1937, and the University of Washington in 1946 and 1948, but at neither place did he take a degree. During his life he collected an enormous personal library in the social sciences; furthermore, he had read and understood these volumes.

Smith's bibliography is recorded in the *American Anthropologist*, Volume 62, Number 6, pages 1048-9, 1960. There should be added: "A Brief Description of an Indian Ruin Near Shonesburg, Utah," *Zion and Brice Nature Notes*, Volume 6, Number 1, 1934. This article was subsequently reprinted as *University of Utah Anthropological Papers*, Number 4, 1950.

Smith's sudden death in May, 1960, while serving as Visiting Professor at the University of Montana, has closed another era in the history of anthropology in Utah.

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