

KARL SCHMITT — 1915-1952

On August 6, 1952, Karl Schmitt was killed when his car was struck by a train at Magdalena, New Mexico, while he and his family were on their customary vacation in the Southwest. His death is a great loss, not only to his colleagues and friends, but to the field of anthropology.

Born in Albany, New York on December 20, 1915, Karl spent the greater part of his youth in Washington, D.C., where he graduated from William McKinley High School and from George Washington University, receiving his B.S. degree in 1938 in the field of geology.

Participation in archaeological work of the United States National Museum in western Missouri influenced him to enter the University of Chicago in the fall of 1938 to study anthropology. A second season with the United States National Museum excavation party was spent in eastern Kansas. In 1939, he worked at the Kincaid site in southern Illinois and in 1940 he shifted his attention to the eastern seaboard. During this latter period, he conducted work for the Broome County Historical Society at Castle Creek in New York, and at Potomac Creek, Virginia for the United States National Museum. In March, 1941, Karl began a year of service as archaeologist for the National Park Service at Ocmulgee National Monument, Macon, Georgia, and further widened his experience.

In August, 1941, he married Iva Osanai, a student of anthropology at the University, and in the spring of 1942 he returned to Chicago to complete and receive his M.A. degree in anthropology. However, he soon entered the army as an Aviation Cadet, whereupon he was returned to the University of Chicago for training as a weather observer and later was commissioned as an Air Corp Weather Officer. The following three years were spent in setting up or operating weather stations both in the United States and the Southwest Pacific.

Mustered out a Major, Karl returned to do graduate work at the University of Chicago where he was awarded a Teaching Assistantship. The doctorate 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 primarily because of the state's opportunities for field work and his growing interest in the Plains area. During his five years at the University of Oklahoma, Karl devoted his energies to teaching, advising students, doing fieldwork among the Indians, working in the labs or writing reports. Social activities he eschewed as too demanding upon his time.

Karl's chief contributions, aside from his influence upon students, lie in the fields of archaeology and ethnology. His reports on the Middle Atlantic States chronology and sites in the Washita River valley of Oklahoma are important. Karl was deeply interested in historic or proto-historic archaeology and felt the need for broader ethnological interpretations of archaeological materials.

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The Indians of Oklahoma offered a great attraction for Karl. Maintaining excellent rapport, he worked among the Wichita, Caddo, Creek, Shawnee, Pawnee, and many other groups.

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. Just prior to his death, Karl had the pleasure of seeing in print his major work entitled "Wichita Kinship: Past and Present," written in collaboration with his wife, Iva. He was one of the prime movers in the formation of the Oklahoma Anthropological

Society, serving as Secretary-Treasurer during the early months of its existence.

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 have 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 all of us of an esteemed friend, but also terminated the career of a personality showing promise of continuing significant contributions to anthropology.

ROBERT E. BELL

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