

J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology



Mary C. Beaudry

Mary Carolyn Beaudry is the recipient of the 2013 Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology. The award was presented to Mary at the SHA's annual conference in Leicester, United Kingdom, in recognition of her dedication to scholarship, innovative and pioneering work, commitment to mentoring students, and lifetime contributions in the field of historical archaeology.

Menu

Mary's wide-ranging interests in so many different areas are remarkable and impressive. One look at her curriculum vitae provides salient affirmation on her selection as the 2013 J. C. Harrington medalist. Her diverse research interests are reflected in her numerous publications and papers, as well as through the myriad courses she has offered to students over the years. She has influenced almost every historical archaeologist in some way—in her classroom, alongside her in the field, coauthoring a paper, being on a committee, serving with her for the SHA, or perhaps just by reading one of her many books or articles. From the first moment people meet her, they are exposed to an incredible intellectual ride with one of the principal architects of the discipline who has an exemplary record of scholarship, mentoring, and service.

In recent years, Mary has been exploring and teaching the anthropology of food, an interest that she has shared with many of her colleagues and students. Mary herself is an extraordinary banquet that we all have the privilege to enjoy.

Setting the Table

Mary Carolyn Beaudry came into this world with boundless energy and curiosity, further stimulated by her life as a child of a military family, moving from place to place. Her family eventually settled in Virginia, where her father worked at Fort Eustis, and her mother regularly brought her and her sisters on visits to nearby historic plantations and Colonial Williamsburg, offering her a glimpse of life in pre-Revolutionary America.

Amuse-Bouche or Appetizer

Mary's education was a mixed recipe that involved many ingredients. When she began her undergraduate study at the College of William and Mary, she was enrolled as an English major and aspired to become a writer. This choice of a potential profession comes as no surprise to her numerous colleagues and students who have had the privilege of reading her work. A colleague once described her articles on archaeology as demonstrating "literary elegance" (Evans 2012). This is a testament to her continued interest in exploring the written word throughout her career.

In 1970, Mary enrolled in Dr. Norman Barka's Introduction to Anthropology class in order to fulfill a college requirement. When Dr. Barka mentioned in class that he was excavating a shell midden at Maycock's Plantation and that students who were interested in volunteering on the weekends should speak with him after class, Mary jumped at the chance (Beaudry 2009a). One weekend, her fate changed with the introduction of a sharpened popsicle stick. The "tool," handed to her by Lefty Gregory, was to be used for the excavation of a Native American burial. As it turned out, the grave contained the remains of a young boy who was wearing a necklace of copper wire and glass beads. When Lefty explained to her that the necklace was European and dated to the 17th century, she was stunned. After inquiring whether archaeologists could study the historical period and not just prehistory, Mary was told that there was indeed a professional field for the study of historical archaeology. This revelation transformed Mary, and she immediately knew that she wanted to change course and become an historical archaeologist.

Along her educational path, Mary's insatiable curiosity about objects and their function was cemented during the many hours she spent in Dr. Barka's laboratory processing artifacts from Flowerdew Hundred. During the summer before her senior year, she was proud to have been offered a paid position working as a member of the field crew for the excavation at the Poor Potter's site in Yorktown. As the only female crew member, Mary felt in the spotlight when Dr. Barka insisted that she maintain perfectly vertical sidewalls, often stopping to check, measure, and make sure her sidewalls stayed true. The archaeologists and students who have since worked with Mary in the field know that she has never, ever, forgotten this attention to detail.

In 1972, Mary ventured north across the Mason-Dixon Line to study with Jim Deetz at Brown University. She once said that she found Deetz's work much more interesting than that of other archaeologists, so she conducted some research, found out where he was teaching, and applied to Brown with little expectation of admission. Of course, she was accepted.

During the 1970s, women were working toward expanding their influence in many professions. However, there were still many obstacles to surmount, as she and fellow student Anne Yentsch quickly learned. Women enrolled in archaeology courses at Brown were often selected to work with documents, while the male students went off to dig with Dr. Deetz. After her first year at Brown, she returned to Virginia, where she continued to focus on documentary research for several domestic sites, spurring her interest in probate inventories.

In her 1980 doctoral dissertation, *"Or What Else You Please to Call It": Folk Semantic Domains in Early Virginia Probate Inventories*, Mary combined both her intimate knowledge of Chesapeake material culture with her expertise in interpreting documentary evidence (Beaudry 1980a). As Mary later explained, the language used in probate records represents a "folk nomenclature," which is significant for interpreting and analyzing how the people who were using the vessels conceptualized them (Beaudry 1988:45). Her work from this period remains one of the most outstanding integrations of linguistic anthropology and archaeology. This is just a taste of the innovative and varied topics that Mary would focus on during the next three decades.

Soup

Following her successful dissertation defense, Mary was offered a job as assistant professor of anthropology at Boston University (BU). Shortly after she arrived, she was one of a few scholars hired to help build a new program in archaeology. Almost immediately, Mary began to acquire a large number of students and played a critical role in building a highly respected archaeology program. Her classes were always extremely popular, and not just because they were on occasion held in the nearby pub.

Much like Norm Barka before her, Mary quickly instituted “weekend excavations,” where she invited her students to volunteer at archaeological sites in eastern Massachusetts. Many of these projects turned into papers, articles, theses, and dissertations for her students. In 1983, she requested that her students volunteer at the Paul Revere House. Upon arrival, each volunteer was presented with trowels and screens, and set to work. Over the next three decades, Mary provided her students with a variety of opportunities to learn and hone their field skills.

In 1985, Mary began to work with several colleagues at the Lowell Boott Mills in Massachusetts. This multiyear project reflected her wide-ranging interests in household makeup, material culture, corporate paternalism, oral histories, and historical documents. With her colleagues, the project produced in-depth information about the daily lives of individuals “living on the Boott” (Beaudry 1989). This landmark project also produced a detailed analysis of the landscape of the boardinghouse and the overseer’s house by employing a comprehensive approach to the archaeology, intertwining various sciences, documentary evidence, and oral history (Mrozowski and Beaudry 1990). Rather than analyzing artifacts in a void, she encouraged the team to speculate how the people they were studying actually saw themselves and their possessions, without simply fitting them into predetermined categories. During this process, Mary became a consummate storyteller, sharing the past and the lives of the individuals that she unearthed with the world. In the end, she and her colleagues generated important information for the National Park Service to use in its management and interpretation of Lowell National Historical Park.

In 1988, Mary published the edited volume *Documentary Archaeology in the New World*, introducing the reader to the wealth of documentary resources available, as well as providing a guide to the innovative interpretation of historical archaeological materials. The volume also contains one of her most cited articles, “A Vessel Typology for Early Chesapeake Ceramics: The Potomac Typological System,” which had originally appeared in *Historical Archaeology* in 1983 (Beaudry et al. 1983). POTS, as this work has been called, was a collaborative effort with several leading scholars working with material cultural in the Chesapeake. Concerned with the problem that varied names were used for the same vessel types in project reports throughout the region, Mary and her coauthors endeavored to categorize vessels in a manner that would “make the cultural dynamics behind them more accessible” (Beaudry et al. 2000:22–30). Mary’s inclusion of this article in *Documentary Archaeology in the New World* provided a venue for this important work to reach a broader audience. While most historical archaeologists used documents in their research, Mary was a pioneer who encouraged colleagues and students to find ways to move beyond a simple reiteration of the information in documents and instead interpret the data that can be found in these vital resources.

The archaeological investigation at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm was another multiyear, multidisciplinary project that Mary undertook. Her interest in the diverse families that occupied the site over three centuries and their intimate connection with the house, their associated material culture, and, more importantly, the land, introduced those involved in the project to a delightful bounty of data to share at any dinner table.

Mary’s love of language has always been evident when working with her students on a variety of projects. She often encouraged her students to coauthor papers with her for conferences. On one occasion she included the word “prosopographically” in a coauthored paper. This was a word that the student had never seen before. Mary then informed her that as the second author, the student would have to deliver the paper at the conference. Needless to say, the student practiced the word over and over, sure that she was going to mispronounce one of Mary’s gems. At the

conference, Mary was there, front and center, encouraging the student, and, even when the word was inevitably mispronounced, Mary complimented her on the presentation. That kind of mentoring is rare and much appreciated by all of her students.

During the 1980s, Mary began to take on leadership roles in several professional associations. Below are just a few examples of her dedication and leadership in this capacity. She became the editor of the journal *Northeast Historical Archaeology*, making it into a first-rate, peer-reviewed publication. For her nearly two decades of work, the Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology presented her with its Award of Service. Mary has also excelled in her volunteer efforts for the SHA. She has served on a multitude of committees, including being one of the founders of the Women's Caucus (now the Gender and Minority Affairs Committee). Mary has also served the SHA as conference chair (1985), director (1986–1988), and president (1989).

There are very few individuals in the field who have had such a profound influence over the development of so many young archaeologists. Each of her students was encouraged to volunteer, and many have followed up by serving on the committees and boards of numerous regional and national associations dedicated to the field of historical archaeology. By her example, Mary truly instilled in her students the notion of service to their chosen field.

Like a gourmet chef, Mary has experimented in her “kitchen” with many aspects of historical archaeology. Her keen interest and enthusiasm have instilled in all of her students a curiosity for all segments of the human experience. She has given a new meaning to the term mentor in her roles as a professor, graduate-student advisor, dissertation advisor, and now as the chair of the Department of Archaeology at BU.

Main Course

Mary's care and devotion to education in archaeology is visible in so many threads of her work. Her interest in all things historical archaeological, when blended with a continual influx of students eager to engage in fresh lines of research, has been a recipe for creativity and innovation. Teaching and advising and otherwise interacting with multiple generations of students has, in Mary's own words, affected her intellectual growth and career path in many ways. Her openness to new ideas, her willingness to collaborate with students, and the plasticity of her thinking and writing has permitted an engagement with a wide variety of sites across time and space.

Mary has graduated 21 Ph.D. students and has served on 27 additional Ph.D. committees at BU and at many other universities. Her Ph.D. students include Myriam S. L. Arcangeli, Christa M. Beranek, Stephen A. Brighton, Alexandra A. Chan, Christopher A. Dixon, Julie H. Earnstein, Brent R. Fortenberry, Conrad M. Goodwin, Christina J. Hodge, Karen Anne Hutchins, David B. Landon, Ann-Eliza H. Lewis, Sara F. Mascia, Karen B. Metheny, Ruth Ann Murray, Travis G. Parno, Elizabeth S. Peña, Todd M. Reck, Gayle E. Sawtelle, Michelle M. Terrell, and Carolyn L. White. She has graduated 20 M.A. students in archaeology as well as in BU's Gastronomy Program. She has shepherded many undergraduate students through thesis research, chairing 12 honors committees while serving on many others.

After Mary was firmly established at BU, she began to extend her expertise more broadly, and from the 1990s through the present day she has engaged in research that has often focused on the household, but in many different contexts. She participated in numerous New England projects, ranging from excavations on Boston's Beacon Hill to smaller-scale excavations on assorted historical period house sites, often with her students. Massachusetts examples include excavations on Nantucket at the African Meeting House, the investigation of the 71 Joy Street privy in Boston, a survey of the Fairbanks House property in Dedham, and survey and testing at the Wakefield Charitable Trust Property in Milton. Farther afield, Mary worked in Scotland on the Flora McDonald Project on the island of South Uist with Dr. James Symonds, and she recently has been working on the island of Montserrat with Lydia Pulsipher, Mac Goodwin, and Jessica Streibel MacLean.

Mary has published eight books, including *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (2006) and *Documentary Archaeology in the New World* (1988). She has collaborated with many colleagues on volumes addressing wide-ranging topics: *Archaeologies of Mobility and*

Movement (Beaudry and Parno 2013); material culture, *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Hicks and Beaudry 2010); the transatlantic world *Interpreting the Early Modern World: Transatlantic Perspectives* (Beaudry and Symonds 2010); historical archaeology, *The Cambridge Companion to Historical Archaeology*, (Hicks and Beaudry 2006); the Lowell excavations, *Living on the Boott: Historical Archaeology at the Boott Mills Boardinghouses in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Mrozowski et al. 1996); and a festschrift for James Deetz, *The Art and Mystery of Historical Archaeology: Essays in Honor of James Deetz* (Yentsch and Beaudry 1992).

She has published over 80 book chapters and articles in peer-reviewed journals along with 25 book reviews. She has presented over 115 papers at regional, national, and international conferences, and has given more than 80 public lectures to delighted audiences. Rather than offer a laundry list of Mary's contributions, we offer several perspectives on her work, through several examples, to demonstrate the breadth of her contributions as well as the depth of her influence in the field of historical archaeology.

Mary has an ability to tease out the interesting parts of a project and to take disparate pieces and place them at the center of broader questions within historical archaeology. For example, in 1996, a strange type of ceramic was recovered in several units along a fence line at the Spencer-Peirce-Little site. We (the field-school students, the teaching assistants, and Mary) called it "uglyware" or "wormy ware." Several years later, Mary published an article, entitled "A Pernicious Influence? Japanese Water Drop Ware" in *Ceramics in America* (Beaudry 2004b), about this funny type of ceramic—analyzed, explained, and contextualized. Her traplike mind has produced many moments like this, where a bit of what could be trivia is never quite released but, rather, marinates and becomes an element of something substantial.

Mary's career has never been one of excavate site, publish on said site, move to next site, and repeat. As a chef gathers influences from a lifetime of meals, each of Mary's projects has acted as an ingredient for present and future dishes. Like an excellent chef, Mary has been testing recipes along several themes throughout her career. Her work on households began in the 1970s, inspired by the work of the new social history, and she has returned to that topic throughout her career, publishing on her work at Lowell (Beaudry and Mrozowski 1988; Beaudry 1989, 1993) and Spencer-Peirce-Little (Beaudry 1998, 2001–2002), as well as reflecting her analysis on the household work of many others (Beaudry 1999, 2004a). Mary returns to these ideas and then places the theme on the proverbial back burner for a time in order to attend to other pots of projects and ideas. When the time is right, she returns to the stove to reinvent the recipe.

Her work on material culture began with her publication on spoons from the 17th-century Wampanoag burying ground at Burr's Hill in Warren, Rhode Island, reflecting Mary's interest in foodways as well as material culture (Beaudry 1980b). The focus on material culture and materiality is threaded through her publications, and Mary has catalyzed interest in materiality in the field, publishing on material culture (Cochran and Beaudry 2006), small finds (Loren and Beaudry 2006; White and Beaudry 2009), sewing and needlework (Beaudry 2009b, 2010b), as well as editing *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Hicks and Beaudry 2010). She repeatedly pulls together the work of decades and reblends it to create an entirely new dish, as she has done with her work on the material culture of foodways, most recently with her article "Privy to the Feast: Eighty to Supper Tonight" (Beaudry 2010a).

Mary's work on telling the story of the past is yet another important category of research. In publications that use biography (Beaudry 2009b), narrative (Beaudry 1998), and microhistory (Beaudry 2008), she demonstrates through both theory and case studies that the order and sourcing of ingredients in the telling of the past make a difference. It is not just how we as archaeologists tell the story, but it is the angle and approach that matters and impacts what we can know about the past.

Historical archaeologists are indebted to Mary for the range of techniques she has brought to many themes in the field, sometimes cooking long, low, and slow, and other times using intense heat to make a particular point. Her repertoire includes themes of identity, documentary records, industrial archaeology, gender inequality, landscapes, urban archaeology, and method and theory. Her

work has not only established these topics and ideas as essential to the field, but she has revisited and reinterpreted these themes, giving them a “modern twist,” as they say on the cooking shows.

In what can seem effortless to those around her, Mary has produced important and influential scholarship across a number of themes. Many of her publications are synthetic, drawing together ideas from various disciplines while casting a critical eye on previous research and folding in her own work. She has always held fast to an image of historical archaeology as an anthropological endeavor that focuses on the *lives of people* in the past. One need only look over the range of publications in historical archaeology today to see her mark on the work of both established and emerging scholars, as well as on undergraduate and graduate students.

Mary was awarded the Harrington Medal at the SHA's 46th Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology in the United Kingdom, which was most appropriate given her influence and reputation on the east side of the Atlantic. She taught as a visiting professor at the University of Sheffield and at Bristol University, was elected to the North American Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of London, served on the editorial boards of *Post-Medieval Archaeology* and the *Antiquaries Journal*, collaborated with many overseas colleagues, participated in many British conferences, and published with several British presses.

Mary C. Beaudry represents the best of our discipline. The SHA honors her as the 2013 recipient of the J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology for her devotion to education, students, field methods, cultural resource management projects, and the Boston Red Sox, together with her record of scholarship, leadership, and service to historical archaeology.

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