



**North Carolina  
Archaeological Society**

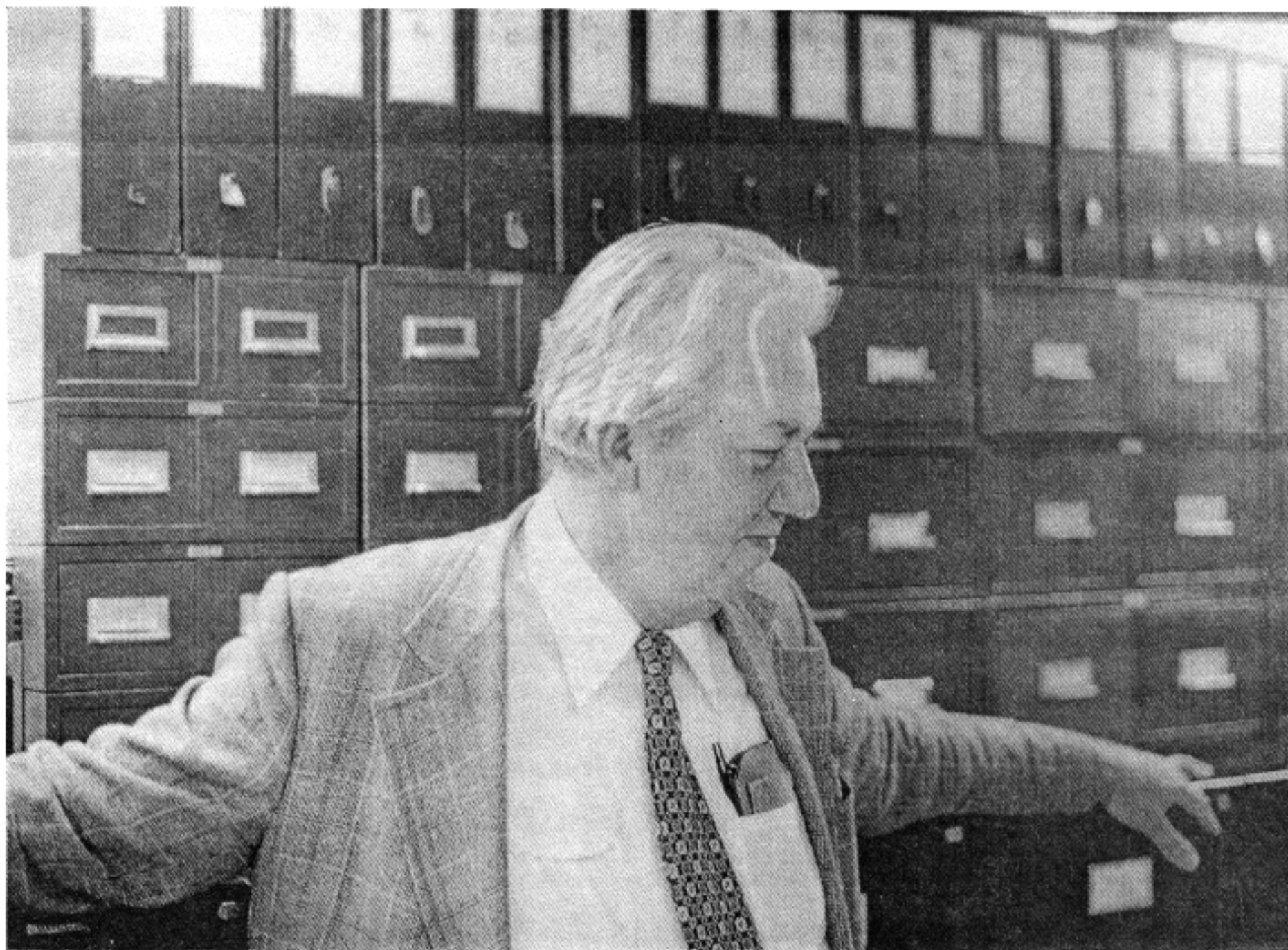
**Newsletter**

4619 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, N.C. 27699-4619

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## **Archaeological and Academic Achievements of Joffre Lanning Coe (1916-2000)**

Linda F. Carnes-McNaughton and R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr.



**Dr. Joffre L. Coe at the Research Laboratories of Anthropology in 1978.**

The time for one of North Carolina archaeology's titans has passed. Joffre Lanning Coe, who James Griffin once referred to as the "Quiet Giant of Southeastern Archaeology," died September 21 in Chapel Hill after a long illness. He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Sally Denton Coe, and sons, Joffre Lanning Coe, Jr. and Damon Denton Coe, and their families.

Joffre Coe attended Brevard College and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of North Carolina before serving in the Army Air Force during World War II. He later attended graduate school at the University of Michigan, where he received an M.A. in Anthropology in 1948 and a Ph.D. in Anthropology in 1959. He was best known as director of the Research Laboratories of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina from 1948 until his retirement in 1982. During that time he also served the university as a professor of Anthropology and was editor and executive secretary of the North Carolina Archaeological Society.

Dr. Coe was the author of two book-length monographs: *The Formative Cultures of the Carolina Piedmont* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 54 [1964]), a revision of his doctoral thesis which defined the Archaic cultural sequence

for eastern North America; and *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy* (University of North Carolina Press, 1995), which documented archaeological research under his direction from 1937 to 1987 at this late prehistoric mound center. He also directed archaeological research at several other significant sites throughout the state, including Wall, Lowder's Ferry, Hardaway, Doerschuk, Gaston, and Upper Sauratown in the piedmont; Warren Wilson, Garden Creek, and Coweeta Creek in the mountains; and Cold Morning near the coast.

Joffre Coe was an early member of the North Carolina Archaeological Society, founded in 1933, and gave his first professional paper--titled "Planning an Archaeological Survey of North Carolina"--at the Society's 1934 meeting, held in Raleigh. He was a recipient of the Ruth Coltrane Cannon award, given by the Historic Preservation Society of North Carolina, and was president of the Eastern States Archaeological Federation during the early 1960s. Dr. Coe will best be remembered as a reticent teacher of archaeological methods and analytical tools. He chaired or served as a member on more than two dozen graduate thesis committees, and many of his former students have gone on to become leaders in North American archaeology.



## The Teacher

Advisor,  
And enigmatic guru,  
The inscrutable Coe  
Said I should do it myself.

So I chose many variables,  
Rim and vessel form,  
Temper and hardness,  
Color, thickness,  
Surface treatment,  
And decoration.

Six weeks later  
The pottery seriation  
Showed no pattern.  
"Try reducing the variables."  
He advised,  
And the pattern was revealed.

Proudly I showed him  
The graph I had made  
Of the temporal correlation  
Of pottery types I had found

In a drill voice he said,  
I knew that so many attributes  
Wouldn't work."

Why in the world  
Didn't you tell me?  
I could have saved  
Six weeks time!

If I had told you," he replied,  
By tomorrow you would forget.  
"Now you'll remember forever."

I can't teach you to become  
A good archaeologist.  
You must learn that  
On your own."

Good archaeologists are born,  
Not made," he said.  
The best ones come from  
A childhood interest  
In natural science,  
In collecting insects, butterflies, rocks,  
"And arrowheads."

The archaeological answers  
Are not in the back of the book,  
Or in the front for that matter.  
They come from a love  
Of the challenge of understanding data,  
Combined with a passion  
"To answer questions."

When I showed him a spearpoint  
I had found on my first site,  
He said, "Dig here,  
"And don't stop until you hit water!"

Later I told his wife  
Of my discovery of the stratified site  
I found there, and she said,  
"Before you found it,"  
Joffre told me you would,  
But he wanted you to find it  
"On your own."

"They teach most who teach least,"  
Was his creed.  
I simply point the way,  
"Forcing you to teach yourself."

Learning under Coe  
Was great frustration,  
With my anger intense at times.  
He was a goad for me  
To learn on my own,  
And to achieve,  
And in the doing, to excel,  
To prove to him that I could.

The legacy of the inscrutable Coe is,  
That success is not served  
On a silver platter by a teacher,  
But is dug from the bowels of the earth  
With tools of keen observation  
And a challenge to the creative mind,  
Inspired by a teacher  
Who points the way.

**Stanley South**

**February 17, 1998**

Stanley read this poem at the Memorial  
Service for  
Dr. Coe, September 24, 2000.

# The Other Joffre Coe

Joel Gunn

Since I started coming to North Carolina in the middle 1980s nearly everyone has mentioned the silent Joffre Coe. The last was Stan South's touching poem at the memorial service. Unlike the people who knew him well, I was only privileged to have a half dozen conversations with the progenitor of Atlantic slope archaeology. Also, I have to say that he always seemed like a rather talkative fellow to me, at least within the range of variation of the southern gentleman, which he certainly was. My father was of a similar origin so I am familiar with this sort of person: wise, guiding, but surprisingly tolerant or firm depending on where their convictions came up after careful consideration of issues.

Joffre first came on the scene for me at the 1974 lithic symposium organized by Earl Swanson for the International Congress of Ethnological and Archaeological Sciences. He was the commentator and scolded the symposium participants for not studying old literature enough, but he was also careful to point out the contributions that everyone's paper made. Our second encounter was in some dark foyer in Norman during an SAA where he recruited me for a position at UNC, but I was just starting my dissertation so did not fit his time scheme. Nevertheless, we had another interesting discussion of the way things were while the ceremonies and papers rattled on around us behind closed doors.

Most memorable were four encounters we had after I came to North Carolina in the 1990s to work as a professional archaeologist. Learning the ways of North Carolina archaeology required trips to the doorstep of the by-then retired Joffre. After a hello with Sally we would retire to the basement where he answered my prepared questions about the next project at hand.

I was well in order by then to seek his advice. My first archaeological training in the late 1960s was under the guidance of a French Paleolithic archaeologist. In Europe, Pleistocene archaeologists are trained in sedimentary geology and their visions dwell more on the twists and overlays of long-disappeared rivers and in the recesses and floors of rockshelters inhabited for unbelievable periods of time. When I turned my attention to American archaeology, I found only two practitioners who were using geomorphology adroitly and with insights that revealed the habitats of ancient people. On the West Coast was Raold Fryxel who was more of a sedimentologist, and on the East Coast was Joffre Coe who was fixated on floodplain dynamics.

Joffre's sweeping understanding of floodplain dynamics was catching. I looked up my old acquaintance and began a series of discussions that undergird reports on the floodplain sites I investigated in the region. Each one of these conversations was a gem of knowledge. Joffre was one of those people who has mastered the art of taking up a conversation where the last one left off, even through they might be separated by months or years. Each covered a different aspect of floodplain geometry, eddies, levees, etc. By 1997 I compiled my notes on our conversations and related projects into a something of a long monograph that I should publish some day.

I came to think of Joffre as the proprietor of the southern (archaeological) plantation. He shared his wisdom freely, a true professor emeritus. A reassuring smile, a careful assessment of what was necessary to be done. I always thought of him when I drove around the southeast beltline that girds Chapel Hill. Now I will never drive that beltline without thinking about how the proprietor has passed his watch.

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## My Tribute to Dr. Coe

Linda F. Stine

Dr. Coe's seminal contributions to Chapel Hill and to the archaeology of North Carolina will never be forgotten. He is and will continue to be missed. On a personal note, I am grateful that Dr. Coe instilled in me an abiding love of southeastern archaeology as an undergraduate in the mid-1970s. A decade later he helped me finish my doctorate at UNC-CH, even though my topic dealt with twentieth-century farmsteads and issues of race, class, and gender. It happened like this:

After the initial shock of Roy Dickens' death, it was clear that the archaeology students at UNC-CH would need help finishing their programs. I asked Dr. Coe if he would serve on my dissertation committee. It was with deep trepidation that I approached our lunch at his "other office" (the Four Corners on Franklin Street) to talk it over. Our lunch lasted at least two hours. (The food was good but for some reason my stomach was in knots.) We talked about archaeology in general, school, and debated if archaeology is archaeology regardless of time period (he said of course it is). Dr. Coe agreed to serve on my committee. When I asked him what kinds of questions I could expect from him on my comprehensive exams he said "Don't worry about it, you just passed my part." Thank you Dr. Coe.

## Dr. Coe's Encouragement

Kenneth H. Suggs

It was with great sadness that I learned of the passing of Dr. Joffre Lanning Coe.

It was with the encouragement, by letter in 1972, from Dr. Coe that I joined the then called Archaeological Society of North Carolina in 1973. I first met Dr. Coe on April 15, 1973, at a Society meeting held at Town Creek Indian Mound in Mt. Gilead. From those initial conversations it has led me to advocational advancements and achievements in Indian Archaeology in the ensuing years.

As we all know, the baton has passed from Dr. Coe and because of his work, the progress in understanding the prehistory of North Carolina has been more rapidly advanced for future generations to build on and advance.

## 2000 NC State Fair

The archaeology booth at the 2000 NC State Fair was a big success and well attended with over 20,000 fairgoers. Let's give thanks to the people at TRC Garrow Associates and the US Army at Fort Bragg for a wonderful display.

### NCAS Newsletter Publication Schedule

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

Spring Issue	February 28
Summer Issue	May 31
Fall Issue	August 31
Winter Issue	November 30

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**Editor:** R.P. Stephen Davis, Jr., Research Laboratories of Archaeology, CB# 3120 Alumni Building, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3120.

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