

# The Journal of Vermont Archaeology

The Vermont Archaeological Society

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Victor R. Rolando, Editor

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## **The Vermont Archaeological Society, Inc**

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(Josh R. Toney photo)

**Dr. James B. Petersen**  
**1954 - 2005**

The archaeology community lost a giant in the field last summer. Dr. James B. Petersen was fatally shot on August 13, 2005 in Brazil, while doing field research in the deep wilds of the Amazon River near Manaus. Chair of the UVM Department of Anthropology and founder of the University of Maine Archaeology Research Center, he was also a long-time VAS Member and Past President.

Jim was born in 1954 at Bristol, Connecticut, and graduated high school in 1972 as class president and valedictorian. After a year at Middlebury College he enrolled at UVM, majored in anthropology, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1979. He went on to set a record at the University of Pittsburgh's Department of Anthropology when he earned his doctorate in less than three years.

Rather than write another memorial to Jim, the VAS Board thought it more appropriate to quote from what has already been written by others about him:

*If only he had more time. Jim was a top notch scholar who devoured the work of others with the same appetite he had for his own research. His incredible capacity for work, his unequalled command of the literature and his own field work experience made him a leading authority in the archaeology of three major culture areas including northeastern North America, the Caribbean and lowland South America. ("Faculty Senate Resolution in*

Memoriam,” presented by John Crock, Director, UVM Consulting Archaeology Program, at the Ira Allen Chapel, September 23, 2005)

*Jim was a dear personal friend and truly loyal to IACA [International Association for Caribbean Archaeology] and our goals; always there to help, both as a Board member and for his colleagues, he was a kind and generous man. Our hearts feel the pain, but his memory will never fade from our minds nor will his contributions to Caribbean Archaeology. (Dr. Jay Haviser, President of the IACA, in *The CAC Review*, August 2005)*

*As both an alumnus and as a distinguished member of our faculty, Professor James Petersen was a shining example of everything to which we aspire at the University of Vermont. His death is a devastating loss not only to our community, but to the wider circle of anthropological research; a field he dramatically reshaped through his inspired work in the Amazon and elsewhere. (Daniel Fogel, UVM President, *Vermont Cynic*, September 27, 2005)*

*His colleagues are left wondering how they will cope without him. Beyond the painful loss of a friend, his scholarly friends are also suffering from the loss of a man who helped keep the archaeology community in Vermont connected. One colleague described him as the community's 'hub.' (Mark Bushnell, "Life in the Past Lane: Jim Petersen broke new ground," *Vermont Sunday Magazine*, August 28, 2005)*

*One key thing about Jim was that he was always willing to share. You can't say that about every scholar. Anything he knew he would share with you. He was probably the finest archaeologist who operated in the Northeast. The guy was extraordinary. (Dr. William A. Haviland, former UVM Professor of Anthropology and Chair of the Anthropology Department, *Vermont Sunday Magazine*, August 28, 2005)*

*While preparing for my Vermont Archeology Month kick-off lecture, I recently reread various articles that Jim wrote about his Vermont and northern New England research. While his revolutionary Brazilian research has gotten a lot of attention, the research he did in Vermont and his passion for Vermont's extraordinary archeological heritage didn't get much write-up. While at the University of Maine Farmington, Jim discovered the earliest farming site in northern New England. His study of the Boucher cemetery site in Highgate, Vermont, revealed that Abenakis—or proto-Abenakis—were brilliant weavers. [And he] was the foremost expert in the Northeast on 3,000 years Native American pottery. His love of ceramics was born when he excavated the Winooski site as a 24-year-old kid. (Giovanna Peebles, State Archeologist, "A Passion for Archaeology," *VAS Newsletter*, November 2005)*

*I will not forget the mind-numbing affect of Jess Robinson's e-mail telling us of Jim's death in the far-off workplace which captured his imagination and curiosity for many years. I wondered how the God I believe in could let such a promising career be ended so needlessly. I felt cheated. And I thought also about the many students who would never have the pleasure of learning from the master. I also knew how his friends and colleagues would be forever deprived of the stimulating and warm friendship they had come to enjoy. And finally, I came back to where I should have started, the painful loss to his wife and family members. (Joseph T. Popecki, VAS Founding Member and Honorary Life Member, "Jim Petersen - A Remembrance," *VAS Newsletter*, November 2005)*

Living in southern Vermont, I didn't see Jim as often as those who worked with or near him in the greater Burlington area, but I will always remember him for always dropping whatever he was doing whenever I was at UVM and peeked into his cramped, little office on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of Williams. I tried never to abuse the valuable time he shared with me discussing VAS business or the latest in the many papers he wrote, co-authored, or reviewed for *The Journal*. We met at my first VAS meeting, back in 1979.

Vic Rolando, Journal Editor

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Front cover photo: *UVM CAP crew excavating a Phase II Unit at the Bivouac Site, Camp Johnson, Colchester, Vermont, during the 2001 study. Kate Pattison is screening and Mark Winburn is excavating (photo by Francis Robinson IV, UVM CAP).*