V. Publications by subscribers

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VI. Book reviews


Reviewed by Andrew L. Christenson

The history of historical archaeology has received little critical attention and by critical I mean in-depth and judicious exploration of the behavior, interaction, and results produced by practitioners in the field. Although, I find reminiscences such as those published by South (1994) fascinating and important sources for historical research, they often will not have the distance needed to understand the field in context.

If you were asked to name a pioneering American historical archaeologist you might come up with Harrington or Cotter or Deetz or South, but Roland Robbins would not likely cross your mind. From the late 40s until the 70s, however, he was a leader in historical archaeology in the Northeast and was virtually the only specialist in Colonial ironworks. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Robbins did not slide into historical archaeology from prehistorical archaeology through some fluke of life. As he approached 40 years of age, he chose historical archaeology as a career path and stuck to it exclusively. Leaving high school at the end of his first year, he worked in business until the stock market crash forced him to start a new career as a window washer! After the war he became intrigued with the location of Thoreau’s cabin at Walden Pond, and through a combination of historical research and fairly primitive excavation, found the location, wrote a popular book on the results, and began a self-directed career as an archaeologist. (Although not discussed in the volume under review, Linebaugh has been involved in reconstructing the work at Walden Pond using Robbins’s detailed notebooks and analyzing the artifacts that were collected but never analyzed.)

Robbins and his few contemporary historical archaeologists operated under the demands of