MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

Thomas W. Jacobsen, 1935–2017

Thomas W. Jacobsen, 81, died peacefully on Sunday, January 15, in his home in St. Louis, Missouri, with his family by his side.

Tom loved archaeology, jazz, and baseball. He turned the first two of those loves into vocations to which he made serious contributions that led to significant recognition. The third, baseball, remained a lifelong tortured passion about which he just knew too much. Add to this list of loves a growing family that he cherished and supported unconditionally, a commitment to democratic principles, and a desire to laugh, and what emerges is a picture of a life lived fully, adventurously, and intentionally.

Born on March 18, 1935, in Mankato, Minnesota, Tom was raised and educated in Minnesota. After earning a BA in political science and classical languages at St. Olaf College (1957) and an MA in Classics from the University of Minnesota (1960), Tom moved to Philadelphia, where he received his doctorate in classical archaeology from the University of Pennsylvania (1964). It was there that he cemented his dedication to the Philadelphia Phillies, begun in his youth. A regular member at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA) in 1962–1963, he wrote his dissertation on the prehistory of Euboia, an interest he later passed on to his students. Tom would go on to play a vital role in the ASCSA community. He was the Jessie Ball DuPont Special Research Fellow in Athens (1980–1981), served on the Managing (1974–1992) and Executive (1980–1984) Committees, and was active in many other ASCSA committees, including two devoted to strategic planning.

Tom spent much of his career in higher education. He taught for two years at Vanderbilt University and the next twenty-six years at Indiana University (Bloomington), where he was a beloved mentor, friend, and colleague to many. He chaired the Department of Classical Studies (1975–1978), and founded and directed the interdisciplinary program in classical archaeology (1970–1985). Tom devoted his scholarly efforts to the study of prehistoric archaeology in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. His earliest excavation experience was at Halieis, and also Kephala on Kea, where he formed a lasting friendship with Colin Renfrew. In 1966, Tom was invited by the distinguished ancient historian Michael Jameson to co-direct the Argolid Exploration Project, a position he held for a decade. During informal survey in the vicinity of Halieis, local antiquarian Adonis Kyrou introduced Tom to a large cave on the headland of Franchthi, the excavation and publication of which was to become the center of his life for over two decades. From 1967 to 1993, Tom directed excavations at the site and oversaw the multidisciplinary research and publication program that resulted in the series Excavations at Franchthi Cave, Greece, published by Indiana University Press (2000).

Franchthi became a profoundly important site for our understanding of European prehistory. Tom’s background in classical languages and archaeology scarcely prepared him for the excavation of the deep stratigraphic sequence found in the cave, the longest and oldest then known at a site in Greece. Franchthi’s location on the route between the Near East and Europe and its nearly 40,000 years of intermittent occupation, from the Palaeolithic through the Neolithic, ensured that the site would long play a leading role in discussions of early seafaring and population movements, the origins of agriculture, and the advent of sedentary life. Tom’s
pioneering approach to Franchthi set a standard in the 1960s for multidisciplinary work, as he brought in specialists of many stripes, emphasized the palaeoecology of the site as well as the artifactual record, water-sieved sediments, saved all finds, and established a comprehensive sequence of radiocarbon dates. In entering uncharted territory—little was known of the Old Stone Age in Greece when he began work at Franchthi—Tom looked to the work of archaeologists he admired who came before him: V. Gordon Childe, Robert Braidwood, Graham Clark, Eric Higgs, and his own professor at the University of Minnesota, William McDonald, director of the regional Minnesota Messenia Expedition.

Tom’s influence on Aegean studies extends not only from his pathbreaking work at Franchthi, but also from the inspiration he provided generations of graduate students in the Program in Classical Archaeology in Bloomington. Visionary for his time, he did not view archaeology as subservient to Classics, art history, or anthropology, but as an independent discipline, which, while it could profitably draw on other fields, had its own set of requirements, method, and theory. To that end, he urged students to take courses in many departments—not only Classics and art history, but also anthropology, soil sciences, geology, statistics, and so on—to craft a well-rounded course of study. Although Tom worried that his students might struggle to find academic employment, most PhDs from the Program have gone on to rewarding positions in academia, publishing, or the museum world.

Tom retired from Indiana University in 1992 at the age of fifty-seven, and moved to New Orleans, where he lived for a quarter of a century and, remarkably, developed a second career as a jazz writer. He had loved jazz since his teenage years when he played the clarinet and tenor saxophone, and listened to the broadcasts of the New Orleans Jazz Club over the powerful Crescent City radio station WWL. While living in New Orleans, he became deeply involved in the local music scene, devoted to the music and musicians of his adopted home. He published extensively on New Orleans jazz, writing three books (the latest appearing in 2016), and serving as a columnist and contributor to periodicals such as The Mississippi Rag and The Clarinet. He and his wife Sharyn repaired their home after it was damaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, but moved to St. Louis in 2014 to be near family as Tom’s health declined.

Tom Jacobsen will be greatly missed. His students remember him with enormous respect: his larger-than-life presence in the Archy House at IU and the American School in Athens, and the brown-bag lunches and seminars he presided over, full of earnest questioning, arguing, and laughter. A taskmaster in his insistence on concise, clear writing, he was also much loved for his wry wit, wisdom, openness, and warmth, qualities to which he held fast to the end. Upon hearing of his death, one of his students mused that even now, the memory—the vitality—of Tom suggests that he would live forever. Perhaps he will, through his work on Franchthi Cave and New Orleans jazz, and through the unbreakable bonds he forged with family and friends and students.

Tom is survived by his wife of twenty years, Sharyn Jacobsen, her daughter, Deborah, and their grandson Diego; his son, Mark Jacobsen (Teri) and grandchildren, Kate and Sarah; daughter Kirsten Jacobsen (Rick), and grandchildren Sam, and Eliza; his son Chuck Freeland (Cheri) and grandchildren Brett, Matthew, and Heather.
This tribute was written by Tracey Cullen, who worked with Tom when she was a graduate student at Indiana University, and Kirsten Jacobsen, Tom’s daughter. A version of it appears at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens website:


Submitted by Matt Christ, Professor and Chair, Classical Studies, IUB