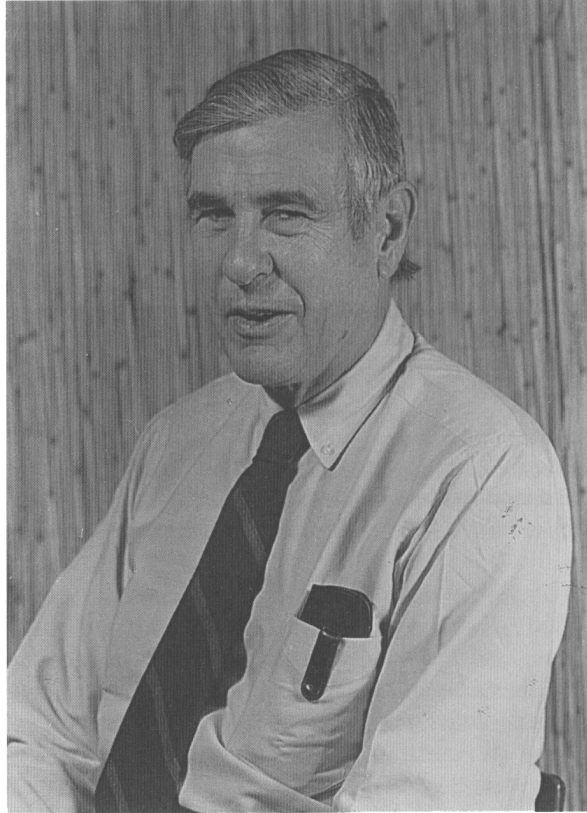


DONALD COLLIER

1911–1995



Donald Collier, 83, curator emeritus of Middle and South American archaeology and ethnology at the Field Museum, Chicago, died on January 23, 1995, in Oakland, California. Although best known for his research and writing on the archaeology of Latin America, he was active, especially early in his career, in research in North America as well. He also maintained a strong interest in museology, in the other branches of anthropology, and in other fields of learning, notably art, architecture, music, and literature.

Don Collier was born in Sparkhill, New York, on May 1, 1911, son of John and Lucy (Wood) Collier. He received his A.B. from the University of California in 1933 and his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1954.

Don's anthropological environment was familial as well as collegial. His father, John, author of *Indians of the Americas*, served as U.S. commissioner of Indian Affairs; and his brother, John Collier,

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Jr., a renowned photographer, was active in visual anthropology and author of a text on that subject. His brother-in-law, René d'Harnoncourt, directed the Museum of Modern Art in New York for many years, but also served as the first chairman of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. (To this day I vividly recall a scene in a storeroom of the Field Museum where Don and René were arguing in an intense but friendly way over the authenticity of a newly acquired Peruvian vessel, with Don exclaiming that he would stake his reputation on the validity of the piece and René advising him not to wager anything so valuable on so dubious a specimen.) Even closer to home, Don's wife, Malcolm Carr Collier (1908–1983), wrote her dissertation and published on the Navaho and served as director of the Curriculum Study Project of the American Anthropological Association. In addition, she had studied music in Vienna and in the 1970s published articles based on her research on the landscape architect Jens Jensen.

It should come as no surprise that whether at their home in Hyde Park in Chicago or at their summer house near Ellison Bay in Door County, Wisconsin, the Collier household constantly functioned almost as though it were a cross between a seminar and a salon, simultaneously serious but fun. I remember many a wonderful evening's discussion ranging from archaeology to art and literature, and from anthropology to architecture and music. Excursions were planned to hear the Chicago Symphony's performance of Ives's Fourth, to view an eclipse, to assess the new tuck pointing of the Robie House, to evaluate the new sculpture by Picasso in the Loop, or to inspect the ram's-head lady's-slipper in the Ridges Sanctuary.

Collier began his archaeological fieldwork in 1933 as a field assistant with the Museum of Northern Arizona with excavations at Wupatki and in archaeological survey work at Tsegie and Skeleton Mesa with the First Rainbow Bridge Monument Valley Expedition. In 1940 he worked on the upper Columbia River in Washington, some of the results of which were published in 1942. Interspersed with this archaeological research was ethnological field training among the Kiowa with the Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, in 1935 and ethnology research in the Northern Plains 1938–1939. The former provided material for his master's paper at the University of Chicago in 1938.

Although Collier spent time in Peru and Bolivia in 1936 on a U.S. Department of Agriculture expedition studying land use and terrace systems and collecting maize varieties, his Andean archaeology had its major impetus in 1937 when he assisted Peru's foremost archaeologist of the time, Julio C. Tello. John Murra (personal communication 1995) relates that this opportunity was instigated by A. L. Kroeber who had himself worked with Tello. Collier's fieldwork with Tello included survey and excavations in the Casma Valley, especially at sites that Tello defined as Chavín or Chavinoid, e.g., Moxeke, Cerro Sechín, and Pallka. Although Collier is not given any real credit in the report, his name does appear on some of the maps, which were reduced from his originals, and it was probably this experience that later prompted Collier to return to Casma in 1956.

Murra notes that when they were together in Ecuador, Collier described Tello as a severe taskmaster; by 1956, when I was with him in Casma, time had mellowed Collier's attitude and he spoke mainly of Tello's interest in Chavín remains, which he described, in a kind of profound and mystical way, as deeply buried and remote. (Don also gave a rather whimsical description of later being taken to visit Tello's grave and not knowing whether he was expected to genuflect or merely remove his hat.)

In 1941–1942 Collier moved northward to work in Ecuador. According to Murra, who accompanied him, the original project was to look for the Chavín style in southern Ecuador and trace it to the North Coast of Peru, but this plan had to be abandoned for political reasons, and the final modified and coauthored results of the project were published by the Field Museum in 1943. These data also served for Murra's master's thesis, a generosity in sharing research that Don would repeat years later with me.

In 1946 Collier joined the Virú Valley Project, a "cutting edge" cooperative undertaking at the time, the results of which were to have a profound and long-enduring effect on the interpretation of Peruvian prehistory. Since the Virú Valley Project never produced an integrated final report, each of the contributions, including Collier's, which served as his Ph.D. dissertation, had to be read separately. Yet on a

different level there was communication and cooperation. Gordon Willey (personal communication 1995) gives his impression of Collier in Virú as being reserved and having a nice formality that was in no way stuffy. He recalls cocktail hour debates at the Hotel de Jacobs in Trujillo with Duncan Strong, Wendy Bennett, Jim Ford, Junius Bird, Cliff Evans, and himself, at which Don Collier would express his own very definite but not overbearing opinions in a pleasant discursive style.

Part way through his work in Virú, Don took a break, borrowed one of the project jeeps and the chauffeur, Lucio, and, accompanied by Gordon Willey, drove south along the coast and inland to Arequipa, where they put up at the famous Quinta Bates. From there they continued to Puno on Lake Titicaca, then northward to Cuzco. At Cuzco they were joined by John Rowe (personal communication 1995), who took them to Inka sites and, at the suggestion of his friend and colleague Victor Navarro del Aguila, who was from Ayacucho, persuaded them to return to Lima by way of that city. This route permitted their short visit to the then-little-known site of Huari and the subsequent coauthored article in *American Antiquity*.

Such a trip would be off the beaten path even today; in 1946 it was a major challenge. John Rowe describes repairs made in Cuzco on the jeep by an ingenious mechanic who reshaped a truck spring to replace the jeep's broken one.

I first met Don in 1954 when I spent a summer at the Field Museum learning how a museum operates. Among many other things, he put me to work cataloging some of the Virú ceramics. Taking pity on a visiting graduate student, he and Malcolm frequently invited me to their home and to various of their activities, and I had the wonderful experience of participating in that ongoing seminar/salon described above. About a year later, Don asked if I would like to be his field assistant on his 1956 archaeological project in the Casma Valley, with the added generous offer of some of the data for a dissertation.

Don, Malcolm, with sons David and Bruce, and I lived for several months in a small house in the desert on Tortugas Bay, just north of the Casma Valley. Don's project followed most of the methods developed in Virú, and at the beginning each day we would survey sites located and sketched from air photos. We would correct the sketch maps, make surface collections, and note other features. Later we selected sites for test pitting, the object being to establish a ceramic sequence employing the methods Ford used in Virú and to place unexcavated sites into the sequence on the basis of architectural details and the surface collections.

I couldn't have asked for a better mentor for my introduction to Peru, its archaeology, its culture, and the problems of working there. Don was a delight to accompany—good humored yet demanding for detail and accuracy in observation. There were moments of tension and worry, however. Don was unwell part of the time, and Bruce, the younger son, was bitten by a local, possibly rabid dog. Fortunately, no rabies appeared.

The archaeological work I have been describing is, of course, only part of the picture; Don was employed primarily as a museum curator. After serving as instructor in anthropology at Washington State College in 1940–1941, he joined the staff of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, where he was to remain for the rest of his career. He began as assistant curator of South American archaeology and ethnology (1941–1943) and was quickly promoted to curator (1943–1964). Between 1964 and 1970 he headed the department as chief curator. In 1971 he returned to being a curator, now of Middle and South American archaeology and ethnology, a job I am certain he preferred to the administrative duties required of a chief curator. In 1976 he became curator emeritus, but hardly ended his career because he continued to participate in museum activities, most notably in a project to create a computer data bank of the museum's anthropology collections in preparation for moving the collections to new storage areas.

Exhibitions in which Collier had a major hand were many and varied. Between 1942 and 1949 the permanent display "Indians Before Columbus" was in preparation, a major innovative exhibition at the time and one that sought to convey ideas rather than just present cases full of artifacts. It undoubtedly inspired Collier and his co-curators Paul Martin and George Quimby to write the book of the same title published in 1947. Many of us will recall reading it as a text in anthropology courses in the late 1940s and the 1950s.

Between 1955 and 1960 Don was involved in the preparation of another permanent exhibition, this time on the ethnography and archaeology of Mesoamerica and Central America. Toward the end of that period, in 1959, he arranged and wrote the catalog for a large loan show, "Indian Art of the Americas," which exhibited pieces from the Field Museum and three other institutions. I believe it must have been in the 1950s as well that the Field Museum worked out a trade of artifacts with Mexico, at the conclusion of which Don wryly remarked that both sides felt they were the losers in the bargain, so it was probably a pretty fair exchange.

In the late 1960s Collier directed two museum projects that in many ways reflect his own broad interests and background. In 1968 the first of these, "Festival of American Indian Art," centered on an exhibition of traditional and contemporary Native American art, but also involved artists and craftspeople at work in the museum, lectures, films, music and dance, thus presenting a living model for the exhibited art. The following year "Fiesta Mexicana" focused on Precolumbian, colonial, and contemporary Mexican folk art, but again included craftspeople and dancers from Mexico, lectures, films, and a market.

The year 1969 also saw Don's involvement with the largest and most comprehensive exhibition assembled to that date on the Cuna of Panama. Three museums, two art galleries, and six private collections loaned materials to "Cuna Art and Life." Changing gears in 1971, he supervised the planning and installation of the permanent Hall of Chinese Jade.

It was in the mid-1970s, however, that Don was responsible for one of the most interesting museum projects of his career, assembling "Ancient Ecuador: Culture, Clay and Creativity 3000–300 B.C." and coauthoring the accompanying catalog with Donald Lathrap and Helen Chandra. This exhibition, mostly pieces on loan from Ecuadorian collections, was a major presentation of the ceramics of three little-known but spectacular periods of Ecuadorian coastal prehistory: Valdivia, Machalilla, and Chorrera. The exhibition not only refined and presented the chronology and made comparisons to other areas, but also used the decorated ceramics as a means of interpreting the cultures in a manner similar to what has been done with Chavín iconography in Peru. The show opened at the Field Museum, traveled to four other locations in the United States and returned to Ecuador where it remains on display in Guayaquil. It was a matter of special concern to Don that the labels and catalog be in Spanish as well as English, not only for the benefit of the Ecuadorians, but also for Chicago's Spanish-speaking population, a concern perhaps presaged in 1969 in "Fiesta Mexicana."

I am not going to attempt to list Don's many society affiliations, committee memberships, and consulting jobs, nor will I elaborate on his strong feelings about the battle between curators and professional exhibition designers, but I must stress his commitment to teaching, both formally and informally. From 1949 to 1973 he was affiliated as lecturer in anthropology with the University of Chicago, where he taught introductory core classes as well as courses on Mesoamerican and Andean archaeology. He also served on graduate committees. Just as important were the occasions when he passed on valuable insights to students in less formal situations, to part-time workers and volunteers in the museum, for example. His ability to teach informally and inspire through enthusiasm led Craig Morris and me to dedicate our coauthored book: "To Donald Collier who instilled in both of us a passion for the Andes."

To those who knew him only professionally through his work, he offered much as an anthropologist, archaeologist, curator, and teacher. To those of us who were fortunate to know him on a more personal level, he offered a "renaissance man" approach to life and an enthusiasm it would be hard to match. For me, the strongest images will always be those evening discussions that ranged so widely, hikes in the woods identifying wildflowers, and sailing in his boat in a stiff wind through Death's Door in Lake Michigan with his sure hand on the tiller and his critical eye on the luff.

DONALD E. THOMPSON

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