



C O M M O N

# Ground

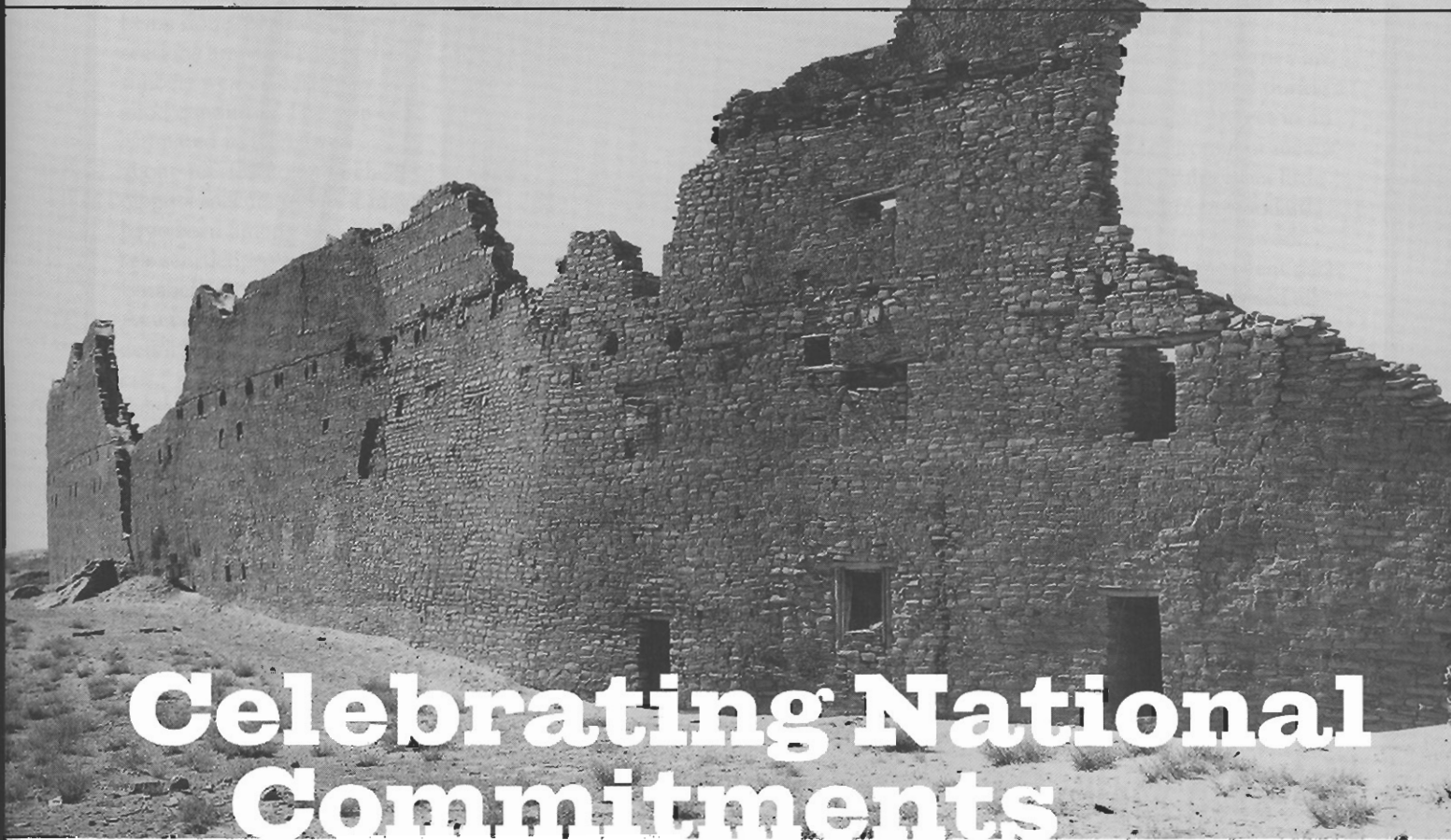
ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

CELEBRATING  
NATIONAL  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

volume 2, number 1 spring 1997

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Cover: Keet Seel, Navajo for "broken pottery." The 160 room structure, located in Navajo National Monument, is the largest Anasazi ruin in Arizona. From *Anasazi Places: The Photographic Vision of William Current*, available from the University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819.

This page: Pueblo Bonito, in Chaco Culture National Historical Park, New Mexico.

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A common thread runs through time, from the Smithsonian's turn-of-the-century excursions into the mound villages of the Southeast, to the post-war development boom, to today. The nation cares about its past.

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The 1950s: new highways, new dams, new housing developments, and an old twist on American expansion. Once again, the nation was face to face with a people as old as the ages.

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The history of Springfield, a village of free African Americans in the Old South, would have remained buried if not for the federal archeology program.

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"Have trowel, will travel" could be the motto of what are sometimes called "dirt archeologists," field archeologists who work on public projects. Though often underpaid and overlooked, they make invaluable contributions to American archeology.

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There is every reason to celebrate the accomplishments of public archeology, and just as much cause to view the record with a critical eye.



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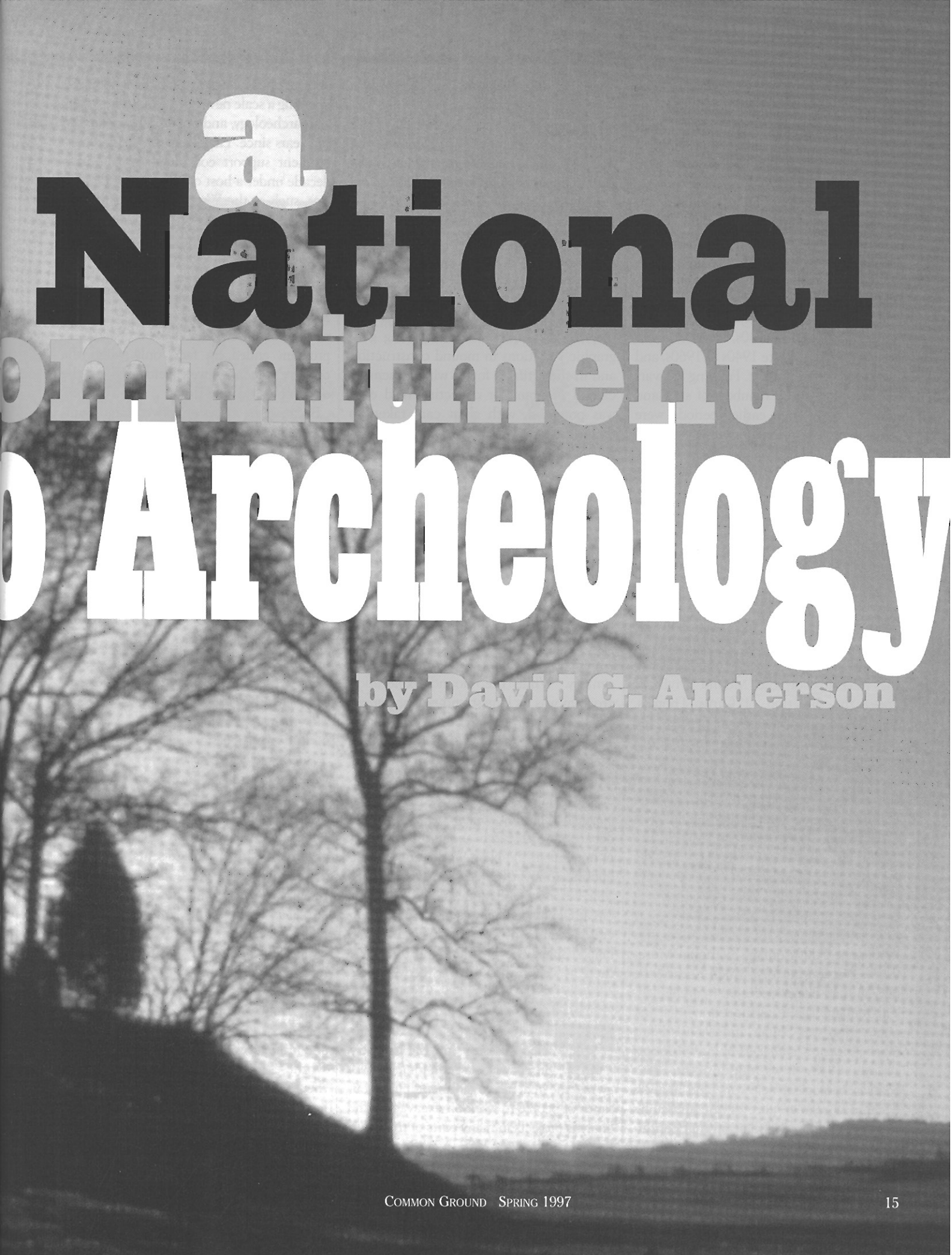
**T**

he federal government of the United States, responding to the will of its citizens, has enacted a number of laws over the past hundred years to preserve and protect archeological remains. Historic preservation is the subject of some of the

oldest environmental legislation in our country, dating back to the turn of the century. Over time, an entire body of legislation has evolved, with measures passed by wide margins if not unanimous tallies almost every time they have come up for vote.

Furthermore, support for archeology comes from state and local governments as well. While many of us realize that archeologists work for federal agencies such as the National Park Service or U.S. Forest Service, there are also major state and local programs across the country. Some of the best known are the Arkansas Archeological Survey and the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, and the community programs in Alexandria, Virginia, and St. Mary's City, Maryland. The strength of these programs is in some measure due to the strong support historic preservation enjoys on the national level.

**ABOVE: NATIVE AMERICAN MOUND AT ETOWAH, GEORGIA. PHOTOGRAPH BY BARBARA GIBBS**



**a**  
**National**  
**Commitment**  
**to Archeology**

by **David G. Anderson**

**T**his commitment can be divided into four major periods, each unique but also tied to and built upon what came before. These periods, identified by the major institutions or programs

under which archeology was conducted, include the National Museum Era, the New Deal Era, the River Basin Era, and the CRM Era, associated with, roughly, the 1880s to early 1930s, the early 1930s to early 1940s, the late 1940s to 1960s, and the 1970s to the present. Funding has varied and with it the numbers of staff and projects, and while earlier periods were characterized by often immense amounts of work, they have been far overshadowed by the activity within the past 30 years.

## THE NATIONAL MUSEUM ERA

**S**trong federal support dates at least as far back as 1881, when Congress charged the Smithsonian's Bureau of Ethnology with conducting "continuing investigations relating to moundbuilders, and prehistoric mounds" and the sum of \$5,000 was set aside for the purpose. Over the next decade the Mound Division, under the direction of Cyrus Thomas, examined over 2,000 earthworks across the eastern part of the country. Much of this was done over a four-year period (1882-1886) by a small group of field directors, who made a whirlwind tour of the East finding, mapping, and testing mound sites with crews of local laborers (for more on how this came about, see the suggested readings at the end of this article).

The work of the Mound Division has come to be recognized as the beginnings of modern archeology in the United States. While the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, which housed the bureau, had been interested in archeological remains since its inception—its first publication was Squier and Davis's landmark *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley* in 1848—it was not until the 1880s that archeological fieldwork and analysis became a regular part of the museum's research program (a tradition that continues to this day). For many years thereafter archeologists at the museum were a major

force shaping the way archeology was done in the United States.

The results of the Mound Division's work appeared in 1894, in one of the finest publications ever produced by American archeology, *Report on the Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology*, authored by Cyrus Thomas. The work laid down a strong intellectual foundation; explorations followed a well conceived research design directed to ascertaining whether the mounds were "built by the Indians" (a major debate in the 19th century), and to questions concerning geographic variations in mound construction and in the artifacts found within them. A careful program for collecting field data was proposed, with great care taken to curate what was found for future generations of scholars. While all of these practices were common in subsequent periods, and were even followed at the time by a few scholars associated with private institutions, the Mound Division's exploration program marked the first time such work occurred on a large scale and under federal sponsorship.

The Bureau of Ethnology (renamed the Bureau of American Ethnology, or BAE, in 1894) continued to play a major role in American archeology well into the present century. While the mound exploration program was its largest and perhaps greatest archeological triumph, the BAE continued to sponsor archeological research across the country, albeit at a much reduced scale compared to its 1880s heyday. Its staff and others at the Smithsonian played a major role in, among other things, debates and research about the antiquity of humans in the New World, and in conducting innovative research with prehistoric ceramics and stone tools. When the Great Depression led to a massive new federal commitment to archeology, BAE staff helped shape the program, and they were there as well in the post-war recovery era.

## THE NEW DEAL

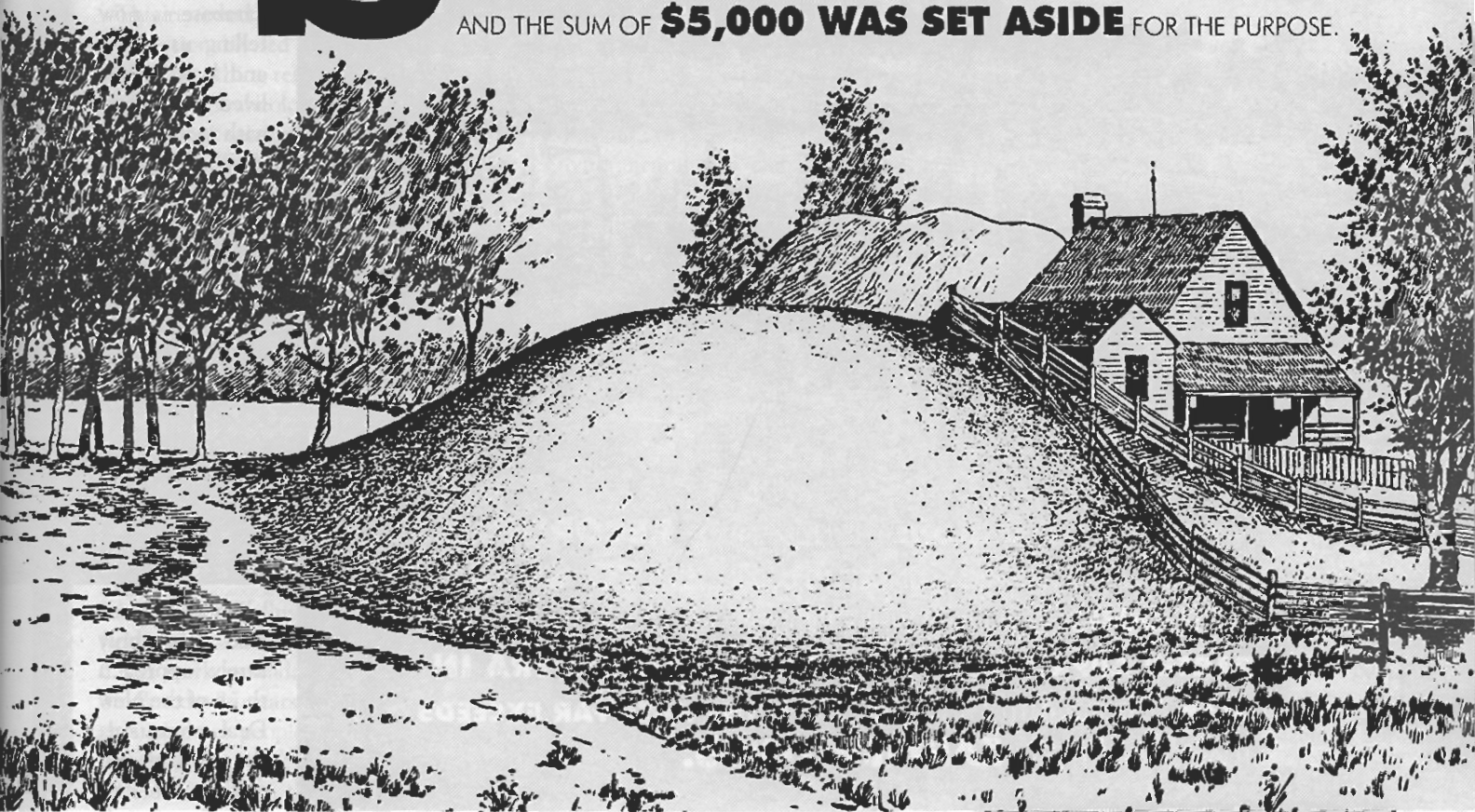
**T**he Great Depression, an unparalleled disaster for the country, proved to be a boon for archeology, as the federal government put thousands of people to work on excavation and analysis projects in many parts of the country. Since the object of the New Deal was to provide relief through employment, field

and laboratory crews were often massive, reaching a scale never before seen in American archeology, and only rarely equaled in the years since. Large-scale, sustained government support continued for almost a decade under a host of programs and agencies, such as the Works Progress Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, Civil Works Administration, Tennessee Valley Authority, and Federal Emergency Relief Administration (for details see the excellent book by Edwin Lyon, *A New Deal for Southeastern Archaeology*, in the suggested reading list). The New Deal archeological program ended, in fact, only when the country's energies were refocused by the onset of World War II.

Because the crews employed large numbers of laborers, wide areas and vast quantities of artifacts were examined. At some sites, entire mounds and acres of villages were excavated, with descriptions of excavation trenches hundreds of feet long and artifact assemblages measured by the ton. For the first time, feature assemblages rather than artifacts received appreciable attention, as house and community plans and successive mound stages were examined in detail. Of critical importance to the success of this program was the skill and dedication of the individual archeologists at the sites and in the labs. Not surprisingly, many of the most prominent American archeologists of the next half century got their start on WPA projects.

One legacy of the New Deal was thus a whole generation of archeologists who had learned to manage large field and analysis projects, and who were able to carry this knowledge with them to new areas and endeavors, and train students capable of doing the same. The era also witnessed the birth of several major regional conferences, as well as archeological programs in many colleges, universities, and museums (where many of the massive collections from the program were placed). The analysis, reporting, and interpretation of New Deal assemblages occupied the talents of archeologists for a full generation and more after the program ended. Classic syntheses of prehistory that appeared in the 1940s and 1950s, by authors such as James A. Ford, James B. Griffin, and Gordon R. Willey, owed much of their inspiration and factual base to New Deal projects. In a very real sense, it took archeol-

**S**TRONG FEDERAL SUPPORT DATES AT LEAST AS FAR BACK AS 1881, WHEN CONGRESS CHARGED THE SMITHSONIAN'S BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY WITH CONDUCTING "CONTINUING INVESTIGATIONS RELATING TO MOUNDBUILDERS, AND PREHISTORIC MOUNDS" AND THE SUM OF \$5,000 WAS SET ASIDE FOR THE PURPOSE.



BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY

ogists a generation to absorb the implications of what they had gathered in the New Deal, and even today, 60 years and more after the program ceased, major reports of investigations using materials gathered at that time continue to appear.

### THE RIVER BASIN PERIOD

**T**he years after World War II saw a development boom in the United States, including the construction of large dams and lakes on many of the nation's waterways. Thanks to concerns raised by the archeological community, and with support provided by

Congress, the River Basin Survey program of the Bureau of American Archacology was created in 1945. For the next 20 years River Basin archeologists conducted surveys and excavations in a number of parts of the country. Although funding was far greater both before and after this time, much excellent work was done, as the best archeologists and practices of the previous era were put to the task. As a coordinated national program, the River Basin Survey was able to achieve a degree of efficiency and uniformly high standards not possible during the New Deal, when work was conducted under a number of different programs and often competing bureaucracies

Above: An 1880s drawing of Mound No. 6, Troyville Mounds, Catahoula Parish, Louisiana; Background: Artist's reconstruction of "The Falcon Warrior," a copper figure found in fragments at Etowah Mounds, Georgia.

(Philip Minthorn's article illustrates some of the work conducted during the River Basin era, and specifically its impact on native peoples).

The period from the 1940s through the 1960s also witnessed the beginnings of a ground swell—both within the profession and the public at large—for legislation to preserve archeological and historical remains, and justify federal funding of excavations. This activity culminated in a

series of laws, such as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, that led directly to the national archeology program in existence today. It was also during this time that the National Science Foundation began to fund archeological projects at a modest level.

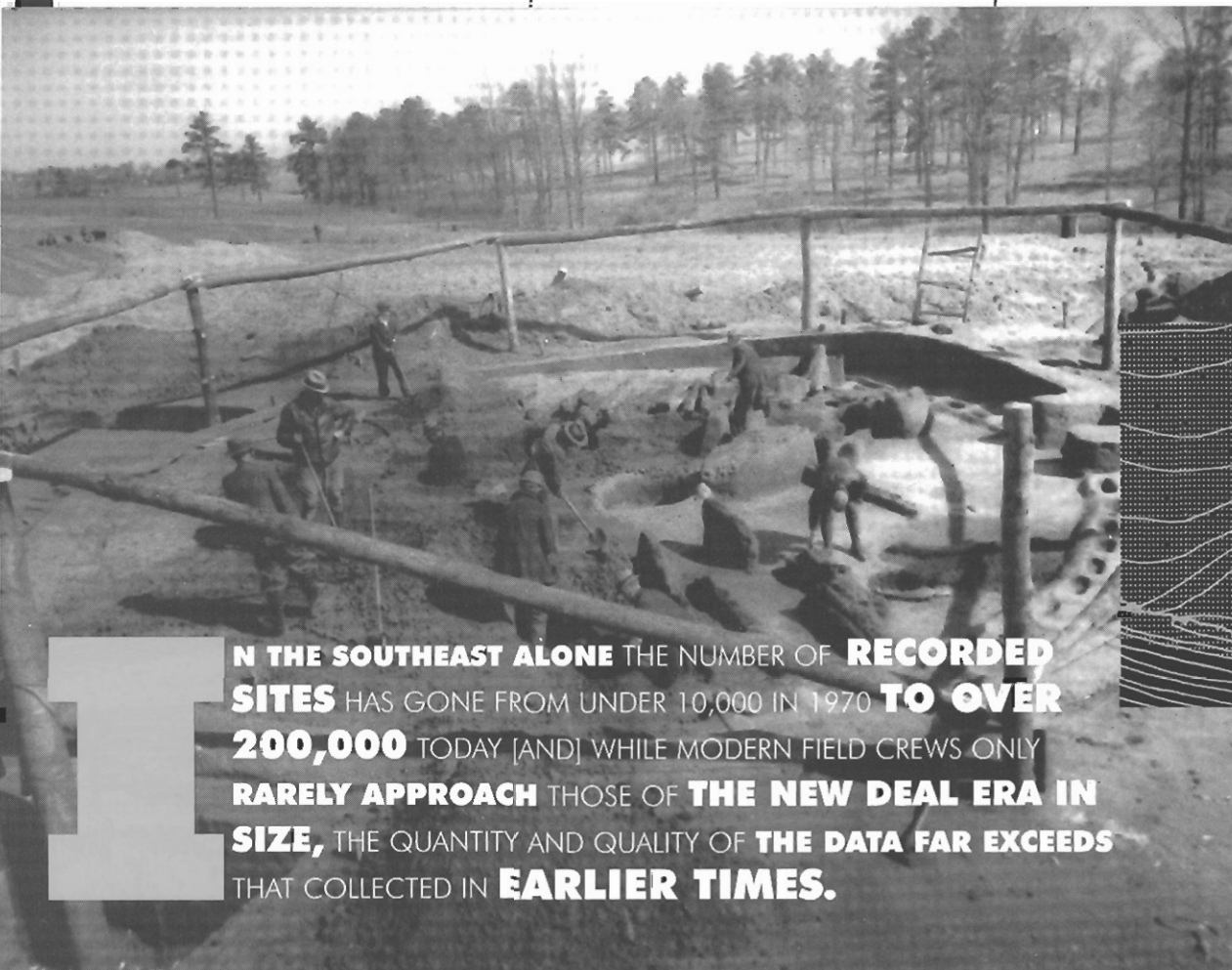
tutions, and within government agencies employing archeologists.

## THE MODERN ERA

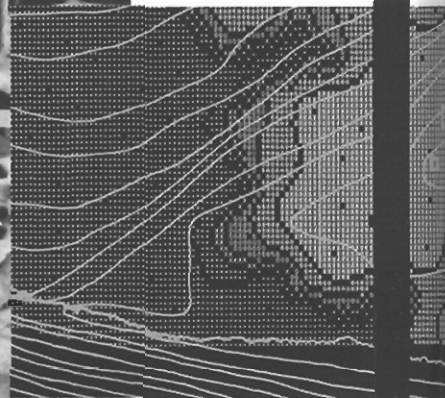
**W**hile much was learned as a result of the federal commitment during earlier periods, it pales in comparison to what has happened

number of recorded sites has increased between 20 and 100 fold in many states. In the Southeast alone the number of recorded sites has gone from under 10,000 in 1970 to over 200,000 today, with almost all of the increase the result of CRM activity. Thousands of these sites have been subject to intensive testing while hundreds have

been subject to large scale data recovery excavations. This vast database is now telling us where and how people lived in the past with increasingly detailed resolution.



**I****N THE SOUTHEAST ALONE THE NUMBER OF RECORDED SITES HAS GONE FROM UNDER 10,000 IN 1970 TO OVER 200,000 TODAY [AND] WHILE MODERN FIELD CREWS ONLY RARELY APPROACH THOSE OF THE NEW DEAL ERA IN SIZE, THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF THE DATA FAR EXCEEDS THAT COLLECTED IN EARLIER TIMES.**



While modern field crews only rarely approach those of the New Deal era in size, the quantity and quality of the data far exceeds that collected in

Above: 1930s excavation at Ocmulgee National Monument, Georgia; Right: Artifact distribution at site threatened by dam construction.

Most of this funding went to individual researchers or institutions, for work both in the United States as well as around the world. To this day NSF serves as a major if not the primary source of funding for archeological fieldwork, outside of that available because of historic preservation and other environmental legislation. For the first time, major field projects were possible by more than those few scholars lucky enough to be affiliated with well-endowed museums or philanthropic insti-

over the past 30 years. The CRM era—so named because of the impact cultural resource management legislation has had on the field—marks the longest period of sustained high level federal support in our nation's history. The National Historic Preservation Act has now been in place for three decades, and it and subsequent complementary legislation have resulted in an unprecedented expansion of knowledge.

Since the mid-1960s, because federal agencies have been required to locate, evaluate, and preserve significant archeological sites on their lands, and these requirements hold for any project where federal monies or licensing is involved, the

earlier times, as the articles here by Baker, Bense, and Joseph demonstrate. Sites of all kinds—historic and prehistoric—are being examined, with cultural resources now understood to encompass a range of property types, including buildings, landscapes, and sacred and traditional use areas. A wide range of technical specialists assist modern excavations, contributing data about past environments, diet, and health. Unlike in earlier eras, finished reports and properly curated collections are now mandatory, ensuring that subsequent generations will be able to use the materials gathered (although the volume, even by earlier standards, is staggering).

While modern excavations are less likely to examine large areas by hand as was typical in the New Deal, the use of heavy equipment on threatened sites by imaginative and highly competent field supervisors has resulted in the discovery, mapping, and excavation of feature assemblages equal to any produced during earlier periods. The I-270 highway project described by Walthall, Farnsworth, and Emerson is a showpiece example of this kind of large scale, machine-assisted data recovery.

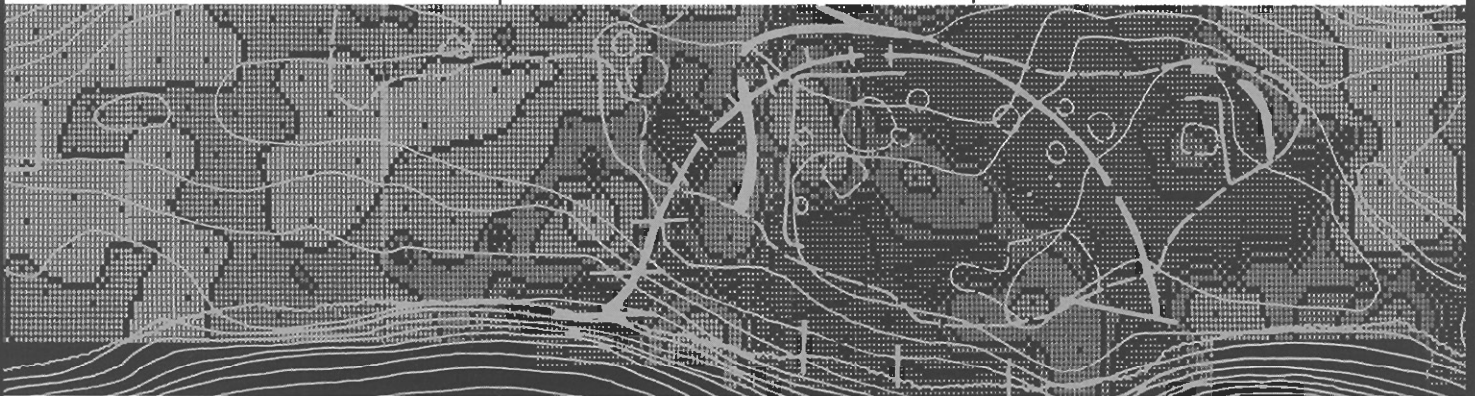
This renewed national commitment has unquestionably led to a surge in employment, something reflected in the dramatic increase of archeologists in university and government settings. For every supervisor or teacher, furthermore, there are 10 or more students and technicians. Theresa

New Deal, when many reports were written and a number of syntheses were produced. A major difference this time, however, is that the national program (so far at least) shows little sign of slowing down, with the result that new data are pouring in all the time. Keeping up with this mass of information will push the profession to its limits in the years to come. We wouldn't want it any other way, though.

What will be increasingly needed are overviews of major field projects past and present; local, subregional, and regional syntheses of work already accomplished (and of what it is telling us); and ideas for improving the system. Archeology can also contribute to understanding the effects of environmental and climate change, and we will likely be exploring these topics with

as well as the numbers of visitors drawn to state and national parks where archeological remains are found. Why is there such interest? Simple human curiosity is part of it, of course, but much of it comes about because archeology helps us not only to better understand the past, but to take pride in it, and in what we as a species have accomplished. For the sake of the resource we must continue to do all we can to maintain this high degree of public and national support.

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Kintz's article illustrates the life of the field techs who do much of the hands-on CRM work nowadays. This job category didn't exist 25 years ago, but now employs thousands of people around the country, mostly on a project by project basis. Experienced techs are the backbone of many projects, and smart directors compete for the best ones and listen to their advice.

### SO WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

So much fieldwork and reporting has occurred in recent years that just keeping track of it all is a major challenge. Fortunately, a great deal of synthesis and interpretation is starting to occur, in part because many of the archeologists who started their careers in CRM during the '70s and '80s are reaching middle age, and spending more time contemplating data they have collected than gathering new material. In this regard, the current era is beginning to resemble the two decades following the

increasing vigor in the years to come.

The need for a sustained federal commitment will not go away; far from it. Sites continue to be destroyed at an alarming rate, and we are going to need to continue to do salvage archaeology on a massive scale in the years ahead. Global population growth and land development are going to place enormous demands on our profession, and in this regard it is fortunate that more and more nations are developing strong historic preservation programs. These demands mean, however, that the profession is going to need people who can conduct rescue archaeology on a large scale, and who can make the right choices in the field to maximize information recovery. Our current CRM program, fortunately, is developing the kind of people capable of handling these challenges.

Archeology is strongly supported in our country, something that can also be measured by the interest and actions of tens of thousands of members of local archeological, historical, and genealogical societies,

### FOR FURTHER READING

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