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## Review of *Accidental Archaeologist: Memoirs of Jesse D. Jennings* by Jesse D. Jennings

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**Accidental Archaeologist: Memoirs of Jesse D. Jennings.** Jesse D. Jennings. Foreword by C. Melvin Aikens. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994. xxi+307 pp. Photos, résumé, index. (ISBN 0-87480-452-3).

The history of twentieth-century archaeology as told by its early practitioners is finding an appreciative audience in a generation of anthropological archaeologists that has matured under the regulatory eye of federal environmental protective legislation. This book is the story of the life of one of the discipline's foremost practitioners. Although autobiographical in its organization, many of the book's chapters can be read as stand-alone accounts of Jesse Jennings's reflections on conducting archaeological investigations in the southeast, Plains, and desert west of North America, as well as in Polynesia and Guatemala.

A man who considers himself to have been "a minority most of my life," Jennings discusses many of the events in his early years that helped shape his attitude, perspective, and values. This is an archaeologist who grew up in poverty during the 1920s and regularly sent money to his mother until the early 1950s, who picked the runt from a litter of puppies to nurture as a companion, and who "attacks" an archaeological site via excavation as if it were an "opponent who sets the rules."

Educated at the University of Chicago prior to World War II, Jennings found himself doing archaeology simply because someone was willing to

pay for his time and effort, a phenomenon well understood by that generation of archaeologists educated in the 1970s. He began his career in the National Park Service as an archaeologist but left government employment in 1948 at the age of thirty-nine because, upon threat of transfer to Washington, D.C., he saw good researchers in the Park Service "reduced to clerks" after finding themselves succumbing to the government's bureaucracy. Jennings's move was definitely a loss to the National Park Service, and yet, for American archaeology and the score of students he later came to guide and nurture, it was a fortunate event.

At the University of Utah until his retirement in the 1980s Jennings initiated and developed the Utah Museum of Natural History, a project he considers one of his most important accomplishments simply because a well designed museum would stimulate and educate children "long after I and my archaeological achievements have been forgotten." Jennings's excavation and reporting of such famous and influential prehistoric sites as Danger Cave, Hogup, Cowboy Cave, and Sudden Shelter in Utah and his supervision of the University of Utah's 1957-1963 investigations of the Colorado River drainage in Glen Canyon prior to its impoundment and inundation by Lake Powell are but a few of the accomplishments that earned him honors from professional archaeological and anthropological organizations and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Many readers of this journal will be interested in Jennings's reflections on his experiences in the Plains. Transferred to Omaha in 1947, he served as a "liaison" between the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution during the early phases of the archaeological salvage program throughout the Missouri River trench prior to the multiple damming of that drainage. His somewhat brief stint on the Plains (1947-1948) was apparently valuable to his later career. Jennings was the first to serve as editor of what later became *The Plains Anthropologist*, one of the strongest regional professional journals in the country. During this period he also wrote a synthesis of Plains prehistory as he saw it, with an outline of the organizational requirements for conducting a Plains research program. He later went on to use these ideas to establish his organization of the famous Glen Canyon project in the late 1950s. Jennings eventually considered the Missouri River Basin one of only four places in the world to be worthy of his affection.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is its brief attempts at self-analysis through which the reader finds insight into a man who commands respect as much for his sensitivity as for his professional career. Jennings writes of his interactions with and appraisal of many of his col-

leagues in a manner that leaves the reader feeling that the writer's honesty and "resistance to vested authority and outmoded conventions" served him well in academia.

Several entertaining photographs of places and people important to Jennings's life and career further enrich the narrative. Also included is a chapter focusing on his personal philosophy of "doing" archaeology and reporting the findings in which he writes that North American prehistory resembles "a vast tapestry of many threads and subtle colors, in which intricate designs could be observed, some being visible over much of the fabric." Jennings's own life and work are woven tightly into this tapestry. Today there are hundreds more people practicing some form of archaeology in the U.S. than during the prime of his career. We are indebted to Jesse Jennings and many of his contemporaries for helping bring to public consciousness the value of this rich historical tapestry. **Ralph J. Hartley**, *National Park Service, Lincoln, Nebraska*.