

## THE AMELIA EARHART MYSTERY: 80 YEARS ON

Author **Kenton Spading, P.E.**, is a civil engineer employed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (St. Paul District). He co-authored the book *Amelia Earhart's Shoes: Is The Mystery Solved?* (2004) which was awarded the 2003 Society of American Archaeology Book Award (available on Amazon.com). He will be participating in the 2017 expedition to Nikumaroro Island.



The disappearance of Amelia Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan in 1937 remains one of the most tantalizing aviation mysteries. She is the most famous female pilot in history due to both her career as an aviator and her mysterious fate.

She soloed in 1921 (the year women won the right to vote), bought her first airplane in 1922 and wasted no time in setting a women's altitude record of 14,000 feet.

In 1928 publisher/publicist George Putnam was tasked with locating "the right sort of girl" to be the first female passenger to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. That dramatic 1928 flight brought her international attention and the U.S. Distinguished Flying Cross. Putnam soon became her manager and she began lecturing and writing on aviation around the country. They married in 1931.

In 1932, Earhart became the first woman — and the second person after Minnesotan Charles Lindbergh — to fly nonstop and solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Her aviation records for the time are extensive.

In 1936, to enhance their marketability, Earhart and Putnam started to plan "The World Flight". The longest ever round-the-world flight at the equator at a grueling 29,000 miles. Fred Noonan was chosen as her navigator because of his vast experience in both marine (he was a licensed ship's captain) and flight navigation.

The trip began on May 20, 1937 in Oakland, California. On June 29, 1937, after stops in Miami, South America, Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, they arrived, 22,000 miles later at Lae, New Guinea. The remaining 7,000 miles, nearly one-fourth of the flight, would be over the featureless, vast, and thus dangerous to navigate, Pacific Ocean. On July 2, 1937, her Lockheed Electra 10E departed Lae for tiny Howland Island. The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Itasca* was there waiting to refuel the Electra after guiding Earhart to the island with directional radio signals. Despite the *Itasca* hearing Earhart's voice at "Strength 5", indicating she was very close by, she did not arrive.

In the days following Earhart's disappearance radio operators in many countries and in the Central Pacific region (e.g. Midway, Guan, Hawaii) reported hearing a women's voice requesting help on Earhart's radio frequency. Much of the subsequent Coast Guard and Navy search, which included the USS *Colorado* with float planes, was driven by these signals that were both considered to be genuine and indicative that she had to be on land likely in the Phoenix Group of Islands near southeast of Howland Island. However, no trace of Earhart, Noonan or the Electra were found.

**AMELIA EARHART MYSTERY *continued*** In 1988 The International Group of Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) revisited the Earhart/Noonan mystery by examining the 1937 search data, maps and the large archival record. TIGHAR, a non-profit organization dedicated to the pursuit of aviation mysteries and preservation, began applying the scientific method to the Earhart investigation. It soon became clear that, like the Navy concluded in 1937, the Phoenix Islands Group were a likely alternative landing target with Gardner Island (now Nikumaroro (Niku)) Island) being the most likely. We discovered that Niku was colonized by the British in 1938 in order to grow coconut (copra). But in 1988 that was not enough evidence to justify an expensive archaeological expedition to one of the most remote places on earth. But in 1989 a 1960 San Diego Tribune article was uncovered. In it Floyd Kilts, who had lived on Niku as a Coast Guardsman in 1946, said the island natives told him that, in 1938, a human skeleton and “woman’s shoes American kind” were discovered on the island while clearing land for planting coconut trees.

So, in 1989 TIGHAR embarked in its first expedition to Niku. The Nikumaroro Hypothesis was soon prepared for testing i.e.: “Earhart and Noonan landed and died on Nikumaroro”. TIGHAR conducted subsequent archaeology investigations on the island in 1991, 1996 and early 1997 to test the hypothesis. Every expedition was and is preceded by archive research. In 1998 I uncovered in England a group of telegrams which included a forensics report, written by Dr. D.W. Hoodless, describing the skeleton found in 1938 on Niku. Dr. Hoodless sketched the bones that he examined.

The British Magistrate on the island, Gerald Gallagher, wrote a telegram to his superiors describing the bones discovery. Gerald wrote: *Skeleton is possibly that of a woman (near a large Ren tree)/ Shoe was a woman’s and probably size 10/ Bones were found on south east corner of the island/ Sextant box [found] /Slight chance that this may be remains of Amelia Earhardt (sic)/ Remains of fire, turtle, and dead birds appear to indicate life.*

This archival research and artifacts uncovered on Niku in 1991, 1996 and 1997 lead to additional archaeology investigations in 1999 and 2001. In 2001 we discovered a site on the southeast corner of the island dubbed the “7 Site”. Near a large Ren tree we found a fire pit, turtle and bird bones.

More archaeological expeditions to Niku occurred in 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2017 (departing June 21). Many of them included underwater searches with divers complemented with sonar and remote operated vehicles. Expeditions to Fijian repositories to search for the 1938 bones occurred in 1999 and 2003. No trace of them has been found. The Chief Archaeologist for the expeditions is Dr. Thomas F. King PhD.

Four sites on the island slated for investigation in 2017 include: 1) a cairn site on the north end (near Camp Zero), 2) the former colonial village store, 3) a bivouac site on the southwest end where pieces of shoes were found in 1991 and, 4) another bivouac site on the southeast end (seven site) where we hypothesize Earhart and perhaps Noonan survived for short time.

**To participate in the June-July 2017 expedition (book a berth on the ship) visit: <http://betchartexpeditions.com/>**

Additional books include:

- *Finding Amelia*. Naval Institute Press 2006, Richard Gillespie
- *Thirteen Bones*. Dog Ear Publications 2009, Dr. Tom King

For more information visit: [www.tighar.org](http://www.tighar.org)

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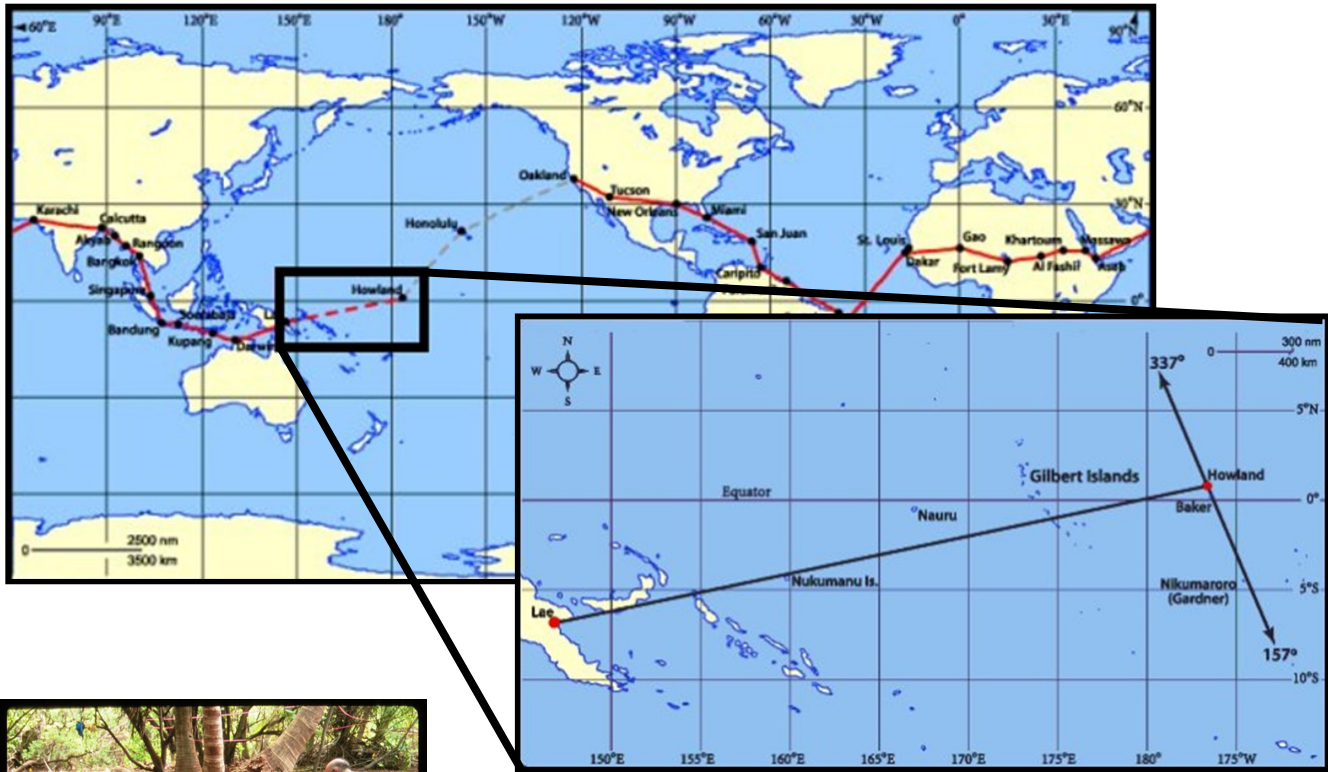
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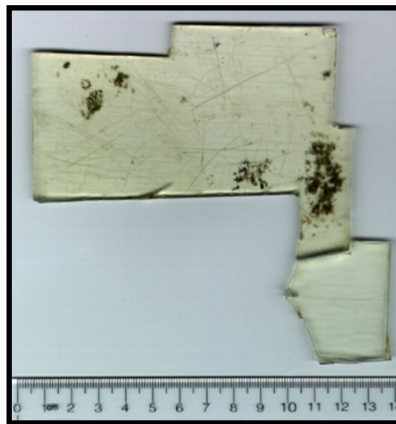
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# AMELIA EARHART MYSTERY: PHOTO ALBUM



*Investigation in progress*



1996: 2-3-V-2 "Aircraft Plexiglas"



1991: 2-2-V-1 "Aluminum Aircraft Skin"



2007: 2-8-S-2 & 2-8-S-30  
Makeup Mirror and Rouge  
Fragments Similar To This Example



Share your thoughts on Minnesota archaeology and find out what is happening right now across the state and region on our page.

## Upcoming Events

### Archaeology for Kids One-Day Camp (Minnesota Historical Society)

Campers will spend the day with trained staff who will help them do archaeological work, including research, digging and sifting at a recreated dig site and working with scientific equipment in a lab. This camp is for ages 10-14, and space is limited to 10. The dates are **June 17**, **July 15**, and **July 29**, from 10am to 4pm. The camp will be at Historic Fort Snelling (200 Tower Ave. in St. Paul). To sign up contact 612-726-1171 or [ftsnelling@mnhs.org](mailto:ftsnelling@mnhs.org). Cost \$65/\$60 MNHS member.

### Arrowheads & Stone Tools Day (Minnesota Historical Society)

Discover the craft of making spear points and arrowheads. Watch as modern flint knappers demonstrate their skills. The dates are **Jun 23** (Noon - 4:00 pm) and **Jun 24** (10:00 am - 3:00 pm). The event is at the North West Company Fur Post (12551 Voyageur Lane in Pine City). For information contact 320-629-6356 or [nwcfur-post@mnhs.org](mailto:nwcfur-post@mnhs.org). Cost \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, veterans/active military and college students; \$6 ages 5-17; free ages 4 and under and MNHS members

### Primitive Arts Gathering, Knap-in & Rendezvous

Primitive skills artisans demonstrate, show their art and provide hands-on workshops. **July 6th-10th** at the Hairy Mosquito Trading Company (21287 Hwy 169, Milaca, MN).



Volume 74 (2015) of *The Minnesota Archaeologist* was mailed to 2015 members in April. Some of the copies have printing errors. If you received a faulty copy please contact Anna Morrow at [anmorrow@q.com](mailto:anmorrow@q.com) or 612-922-7006 and a correct copy will be sent. If you were a current member in 2015 and did not receive the journal, or joined after 2015 and would like a complimentary copy, please let Anna know.

## Recently Held Events



### Minnesota Archaeological Society Annual Dinner

The MAS Annual Dinner on April 21 was a success! Over fifty members and guests met at Hamline University to enjoy good food, see old friends, and meet other folks interested in Minnesota archeology. Seth DePasqual, of Isle Royale National Park, gave a great presentation on his recent archaeological fieldwork along the island's ancient beaches. The crowd was delighted to hear about how Seth and his crew used the latest in remote sensing technology to guide their efforts.



### Play.Tinker.Make. by Amy Ollila

The Minnesota Archaeological Society participated in the Science Museum's event "Play. Tinker. Make" on April 6th, 2017. Over 550 guests came by MAS's booth where they learned about lithic projectile points and how to haft their own spear point. Guests to the booth also decorated their own "sherd" of pottery using authentic tools with designs inspired by Minnesota prehistoric pottery.

## Keith Manthie, Archaeologist by Kent Bakken

Lady and I went out for her regular walk one afternoon. She was the kind of dog who would walk all afternoon if you'd have it. As it happened, we only made it about a block that day. As we often did, we cut across the vacant lot behind the Minnesota AIDS Project office, the lot where the Elliot Park Neighborhood Archaeology Project had done some excavation in a rich urban historic site. There was a car parked in the usually-vacant asphalt lot to the west of the site, and a stranger about my age was standing there – sort of inspecting the lot. This might be expected behavior from an archaeologist, but for someone else it seemed a tad peculiar. I said hi as the dog and I went by, and he returned the greeting. Then he added something unexpected: "Say, do you know anything about the archaeology project that happened here?" And so I met Keith Manthie. What are the chances.

I only know part of his story, especially the part outside of archaeology. I know Keith was born and raised in near-south Minneapolis. Once when I was at his apartment in the old Sears building he pointed out the window towards his nearby childhood home and high school. I know he studied archaeology at the University of Minnesota in 1960s, and did a field school with Elden Johnson. I know spent his career working in areas other than archaeology. Then he took an early retirement, and took the opportunity to pick up a lost thread from earlier in his life.

He jumped back into archaeology. With both feet. I heard that he just showed up out of the blue at the U of M archaeology labs one day, introduced himself, and said he wanted to volunteer. Soon he was there for several hours nearly every weekday. He learned, by doing and by talking and by reading. He learned, and he began to mentor. Soon he was an invaluable presence in the labs, the person who knew both the details and the big picture. He was also the person who had the time to do the things that needed to be done but that no one else had the time to do. I remember visiting one day while Keith was patiently cleaning and repairing an old mounted monkey skeleton. He'd fill me in on who was doing what projects, and sometimes suggest that I offer my help to this or that person on this or that project. He'd ask questions about the collections, the history of the labs, or just about archaeology.

Keith helped us out with subsequent seasons of the Elliot Park Neighborhood Archaeology Project. He worked with the Science Museum and University of Minnesota on excavations in Dakota County. He volunteered on projects in other parts of the world, where the archaeology bears little resemblance to the mud-colored sherds of Minnesota. Keith once told me that he just wanted to be able to say that he was an archaeologist. I remember the day he proudly showed me his new U of M business card. The department had honored his contributions by making him an adjunct (and giving him a parking pass, so he didn't have to pay for parking each day). I shared his pride.

Keith died, aged 69, the day before the 2017 Council for Minnesota Archaeology symposium. That's where I got the unexpected news. In his obituary a few days later, his family suggested memorials to the Minnesota Archaeological Society. Keith's contributions continued.

Friends and colleagues, I give you Keith Manthie. Archaeologist.



*Postscript: The Minnesota Archaeological Society has received over \$1,100 in memory of Keith.*

## Douglas A. Birk Memorial by Scott Anfinson

Minnesota archaeology suffered a great loss on March 8 when Doug Birk (73) died unexpectedly. Doug started his archaeological explorations while still in high school, examining a prehistoric site on his family's resort property on Norway Lake and exploring underwater logging remains in the Brainerd lakes area. This began an almost 60-year career attentive to both Minnesota's prehistoric and historic past.

Doug graduated from Pine River High School in 1962 and then went to the University of Minnesota. With Elden Johnson as his undergraduate advisor, Doug attended field school at Lake Mille Lacs examining the Cooper, Petaga Point, and Vineland Bay sites. He graduated from the U of M in 1966 and was immediately drafted into the US Army where he served three tours of duty in Vietnam as a Portuguese language interpreter.

Returning to Minnesota in 1970, he went to work for the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS). Doug assisted with several salvage excavations (Bryan, Greenbush Borrow, Syl Sand) and then did survey work for the Trunk Highway Program and the Historic Sites survey. He also played a major role in underwater fur trade archaeology until the project ended in 1976. I first met Doug in 1973 when I volunteered to help him with underwater research at Fort Charlotte. When I finished graduate school two years later, Doug helped me get a job at MHS as a highway survey archaeologist. We were good friends for almost 44 years.

Doug left MHS in 1982 and helped found the Institute for Minnesota Archaeology (IMA) where he worked for the next 20 years, mainly focused on excavating 21MO20, a French trading post north of Little Falls. He returned to the U of M, receiving his Master's Degree in 1999. After his IMA years, Doug remained an active independent schol-



ar, publishing numerous articles and manuscripts and pursuing research on logging railroads and the early European presence in Minnesota.

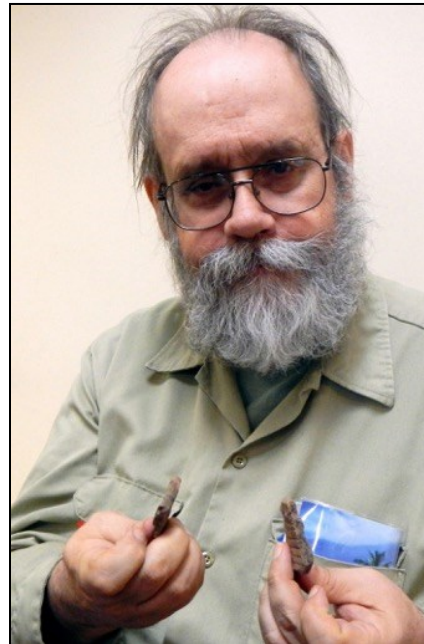
Doug will be remembered for setting a high-standard for excavation, analysis, and writing, although his publication record was hampered by his perfectionism. He was instrumental in developing shovel testing, underwater archaeology, and a diverse Minnesota historical archaeology. Doug never lost his youthful outlook, but he became an elder statesman of Minnesota archaeology and the "father" of fur trade archaeology in the state. Doug was a guy worthy of Kent Flannery's Golden Marshalltown.



## Stephen Mulholland Memorial

**Stephen Leigh Mulholland**, Registered Professional Archaeologist, born February 10, 1956 (Winona), died March 9, 2017 (Duluth). Attended St. Mary's University (Computer Science) in Winona; University of North Dakota - Grand Forks, 1981, B.A. (Anthropology); University of Minnesota, 2002, M.A. (Interdisciplinary Archaeological Studies). Married Susan Mary Collins in 1981. Steve worked as an archaeological technician at the Superior National Forest 1982- 1995, when he joined the Archaeometry Laboratory at University of Minnesota, Duluth. In 2000, Steve formed the Duluth Archaeology Center, LLC with Susan Mulholland and Jennifer (Shafer) Hamilton. For the past 17 years under his guidance the company provided expert cultural resource management services across Minnesota, focusing on archaeological investigations. Steve authored numerous archaeological reports and articles, as well as *The Archaeology of the Fish Lake Dam Site*. He was active in public outreach, sharing his knowledge of the cultural history of Minnesota with students, avocationalists, and professionals. His specific expertise included lithic analysis and tool-stone identification, particularly of northeastern Minnesota. A lifelong project was documentation of the archaeology of the Cloquet River valley. Professional associations included the Council for Minnesota Archaeology (president for 4 years) and the Northern Lakes Archaeological Society

(founding member, president) among others. Other interests included American history, genealogy, cooking, and gardening. His stories of (sometimes imaginary) childhood escapades lightened our life. Steve is survived by wife Susan (Collins) Mulholland of Duluth, parents Russell Lloyd and Kathleen Barbara (Stanek) Mulholland of Spring Valley, brother Scott Mulholland (wife Stephanie) of Spring Valley, sister Tracy Bly (husband Timothy Bly) of LeRoy, and four nieces and nephews, Sarah (husband Josh) Perry of Pine Island, Michael Mulholland of Spring Valley, Nicholas Bly of LeRoy, and Lindsay { husband Cassidy } Milks of LeRoy.



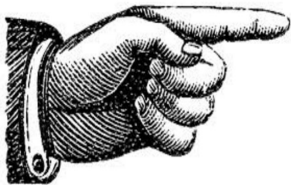
### **Avonlea Projectile Point from Blue Mounds State Park** by LeRoy Gonsior

This Avonlea side-notched projectile point was recovered from Blue Mounds State Park and is made from Grand Meadow Chert. According to Gregory Perino, Avonlea points are the earliest side-notched projectile point associated with large-scale communal bison hunting in the northern Plains. They are thought to be the first true arrow point in the northern Plains and Minnesota. This point was found recently during an archaeological survey of the campground. In the past, a bison bone bed was reportedly discovered along the bottom of the park's south cliff face that apparently was a result of a bison jump. It is ironic that the park today is home to hundreds of bison. In "Stone Tools of Minnesota", Toby Morrow dates the points from between 100-1000 CE. Morrow describes Avonlea points as small, thin, triangular projectile points with side notches placed close to the base.



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Thanks so much. Anna Morrow, [anmorrow@q.com](mailto:anmorrow@q.com)