



R. L. ANDREWS¹
1953–1990

Rhonda Lynette Andrews was recognized by several of her contemporaries as “one of the three truly great perishables analysts of the twentieth century,” an assessment fully supported by her published works.

Born in Groves, Texas, in 1953, Rhonda displayed from a very early age an intense interest in the physical world around her. Not only the familiar household pets like cats and dogs, but also the myriad “backyard” animal life of the Texas Gulf Coast became regular objects of her childhood fascination. Nurtured by her parents, this keen interest in “things living,” as she put it, persisted and was amplified in her early education. It blossomed and expanded during her high-school years in England at the American School of London. During her secondary education, Rhonda was an avid reader of a broad and deep array of subjects, not the least of which were popular and more technical treatments of history and archaeology. She also traveled extensively during that period, visiting such “exotic” locations as Crete and Tanzania.

Upon graduation in 1972, Rhonda returned to the United States to pursue a degree in anthropology. Her choice of anthropology as a career was based on a belief that it was far and away the most eclectic of the sciences, and that its breadth and numerous possibilities for interaction with other fields like biology, geology, and history most closely paralleled her own catholic scholarly interests.

Literally from the outset of her undergraduate education, Rhonda showed the same intense interest in a variety of natural and physical sciences that she had as a child. Enrolled initially at the University of Pittsburgh in an experimental undergraduate program that allowed and encouraged students to

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pursue a self-designed course of study that included hands-on laboratory work, Rhonda became involved in a series of projects, first in physical anthropology and then in archaeology, cementing her interest in the field and shaping her subsequent educational and professional career.

In 1974, Rhonda enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh Summer Field Training Program in Archaeology, which at that time was beginning the second season of excavations at the now internationally known Meadowcroft Rockshelter site. During her first field season she displayed an acute awareness and developed a great mastery of the many nuances of archaeological fieldwork and the subtleties of closed-site excavation. Almost from the outset, she displayed an ability to make and operationalize suggestions for improving the nature and quality of data retrieval, a propensity which both Joel Gunn and myself encouraged to the great benefit of this singular project.

Upon completion of her first season at Meadowcroft, Rhonda had her first exposure to perishables analysis as an assistant, and very soon after that as a full-fledged analyst, in the Basketry Analysis Facility at the University of Pittsburgh. Her initial research involved the vast collection of fiber artifacts from Dirty Shame Rockshelter in Oregon, a project that she subsequently and relentlessly pursued until its completion and publication 12 years later. Shortly after she initiated work on the Dirty Shame material, Rhonda also began her involvement with the analysis of the even more massive corpus of perishable data from Antelope House in Canyon de Chelly, Arizona. Like the Dirty Shame perishables analysis, this project would also take more than a decade to complete.

In rapid and overlapping succession, there followed a long series of other projects including the analysis of textiles from the Bronze-Age site of Bâb edh-Dhrâ' in Jordan; textile impressions from Jarmo in Iran; basketry and related objects from Hinds Cave in Texas; Archaic cordage from Squaw Rockshelter in Ohio; carbonized perishable remains from Meadowcroft Rockshelter in Pennsylvania; baskets and miscellaneous perishables from Walpi Pueblo in Arizona; musk-ox-hair cordage from Avayalik Island in Labrador, Canada; Fremont basketry from cave sites in Idaho; a late Pleistocene/early Holocene hunting net from Sheep Mountain in Wyoming; basketry and related perishables from Lakeside, Floating Island, and Danger caves in Utah; basketry and textiles from Tin Cave in Arizona; and other smaller projects too numerous to enumerate. Most recently, she had taken on the spectacular waterlogged collection from the Archaic Windover Bog Cemetery site in Florida. While working on all of these projects, she completed her first degree in anthropology, graduating *summa cum laude*, and was designated a University Scholar.

Though her involvement with perishable-analysis projects dominated her professional time, she nonetheless continued her interests in others areas. She participated in the Meadowcroft excavations yearly until their completion in 1978, and thereafter engaged in fieldwork at a wide variety of other sites in Pennsylvania and surrounding states, most notably in the reexcavation of the portal deposits at Danger Cave in Utah. In order to better understand the prehistoric stage upon which the actors of antiquity performed, she received a second degree, in geology, again graduating *summa cum laude* and becoming for the second time a University Scholar.

Rhonda was active in a variety of professional organizations, including the Society for American Archaeology, at whose meetings she invariably presented papers on a yearly basis, as well as the Great Basin Archaeological Conference. She also took quiet pride in her membership in Sigma Xi and Phi Beta Kappa.

Throughout her highly productive and multifaceted career, Rhonda was also a gifted draftsman and artifact illustrator—a substantial number of reports, monographs, and publications produced by both the University of Pittsburgh's Cultural Resource Management Program and Basketry Analysis Facility were enhanced by her graphic art skills.

In all of her diverse research activities, many of which were collaborative enterprises with myself and others, Rhonda exhibited a singular constellation of characteristics I have never encountered before and certainly never will again. She was incredibly thorough and precise to the point of being a genuine perfectionist, a trait which is evident in all of her writing. Her background and expertise in research was exhaustive, and no remotely applicable comparative reference escaped her eye. Her analytical and synthetic skills, fortified by a mastery of computers and statistical manipulation, elevated her research to an entirely different plane of interpretation. Though space precludes any elaboration of her contributions in his area, I offer to say her improvements contributed immensely

to the widely recognized precision of the many University of Pittsburgh field projects conducted in the 1970s and 1980s.

Rhonda never missed the opportunity to ask new questions about the objects she examined, and it was always her desire to render the execution of each new project better than the last. And here, she always succeeded. Her major works, notably the Hinds Cave, Dirty Shame, Antelope House, and Walpi projects, were all unanimously hailed as permanent contributions to the field of basketry and textile studies, specifically, and material culture studies, generally.

In these and all of her other publications, the reader is continuously reminded not only of the breadth and depth of her interest but also that the objects she so carefully described were the products of *living* humans in vibrant societies. As they *should* be, artifacts for her were not to be studied simply as artifacts per se, but rather, as documents of complex human behaviors. As such, she "read" those documents like no one else I have ever known.

At the time of her death, Rhonda was characteristically involved in a wide range of projects. These included the final preparation of the Windover Bog Cemetery textile report, the publication of the Nan Ranch Mogollon collections from New Mexico, the publication of the Lakeside and reexcavated Danger Cave portal material from Utah, the final write up of the Bronze-Age Bâb edh-Dhrâ' material from Jordan, and a host of smaller enterprises. All of these projects will be completed in the analytical facility that she was to direct and which now bears her name at the Mercyhurst Archaeological Institute of Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania. This facility, the R. L. Andrews Center for Perishable Analysis, is the direct lineal descendant of the Basketry Analysis Facility that she developed and directed at the University of Pittsburgh and, along with her contribution to this volume and her other published works, will allow her name and signal accomplishments to be perpetuated for future generations of perishables analysts.

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NOTE

- ¹ The lead photograph appears courtesy J. M. Adovasio.