

## ARCTIC

VOL. 54, NO. 2 (JUNE 2001) P. 199–200

## JAMES W. VANSTONE 1925–2001

James W. VanStone died suddenly of heart failure on February 28, 2001 at the age of 75. Known to his friends as Jim, VanStone was one of anthropology's foremost and most prolific northern scholars. He leaves behind many friends, colleagues, and students who will sorely miss him.

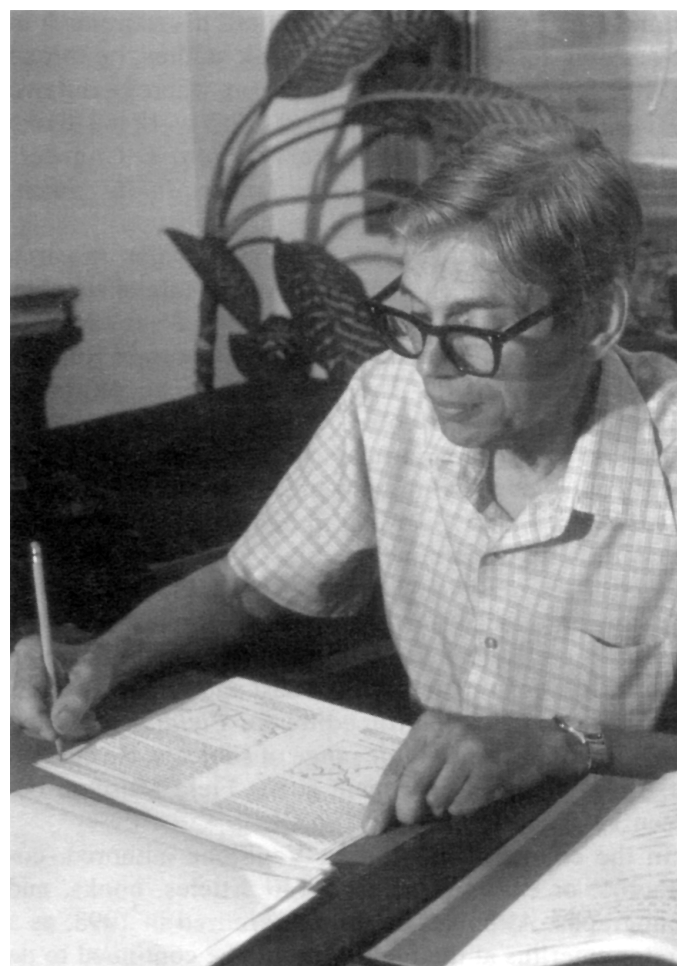
Jim was born on October 3, 1925 in Chicago, Illinois, accompanied by his twin sister Suzanne. As a youth, he moved with his family to Cleveland, Ohio, where he grew up. Jim was stricken with polio as a teenager and spent many months convalescing under the care of his mother. Surgery on his back helped his recovery, although the doctors cautioned him to take it easy on himself. Needless to say, he did not take it easy and led an active life that included paddling umiaqs in Point Hope and driving dogs to work in Fairbanks.

Jim was interested in anthropology from an early age, particularly the archaeology of ancient Egypt. At Oberlin College he studied the closest alternative, art history, because the school lacked an anthropology program. He did have the opportunity to take courses from Loren Eiseley, who encouraged him to do graduate studies in anthropology. Jim followed Eiseley to the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned his master's and doctoral degrees in anthropology in 1950 and 1954.

Although VanStone's master's work was on Plains archaeology, we are fortunate that he met fellow Penn graduate student J. Louis Giddings and began to look north. In 1950, Jim accompanied Giddings to Norton Sound, Alaska, where they tested archaeological sites between Golovnin Bay and Shaktoolik and carried out the third season's excavation at Cape Denbigh. The following year, Jim did his own excavations in Kotzebue for his doctoral dissertation. He later confessed that, even while doing that work, he was more intrigued with the living Eskimo people he met and worked with. That summer he also met Charles Lucier, who became a lifelong friend and collaborator on many projects.

In 1951, VanStone inherited the position formerly held by Giddings at the University of Alaska. While in Fairbanks, he did archaeological surveys and excavations on Nunivak Island, the Copper River, and the Kenai Peninsula. With Wendell Oswalt, VanStone co-founded *Anthropological Papers of the University of Alaska*. During this period, Jim authored a number of papers. Perhaps the most significant was "Russian Exploration in Interior Alaska, an Extract from the Journal of Andrei Glazunov" (VanStone, 1959), one of the first modern uses of Russian-language sources in Alaskan anthropology. Also during this period, he spent a full year living in Point Hope, the result of which was *Point Hope: An Eskimo Village in Transition* (VanStone, 1962), which remains a seminal work on Alaskan Eskimo modernization.

Jim left the University of Alaska in 1958 and spent a year "bumming around Europe." Among other things, he collected a great many books for his personal library,



James VanStone. (Photo by Ron Testa; ©1988 The Field Museum.)

which became the envy of all his colleagues in northern studies and now is an important addition to the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center in Anchorage. After his return to the United States, VanStone accepted a position at the University of Toronto, where he remained until 1966. While at Toronto, he initiated and carried out several significant projects, including ethnographic studies among the Chipewyan at Lutselk'e (formerly Snowdrift) and ethnohistorical and ethnoarchaeological studies in southwestern Alaska. VanStone and Wendell Oswalt's excavations at Crow Village on the Kuskokwim River pioneered the use of archaeology as a means to augment oral and written sources in constructing a historical ethnography of a Native people.

The Crow Village work set the stage for much of VanStone's research between 1963 and 1979, which featured extensive use of archival sources, archaeology, and ethnographic field studies in examining Alaska Native cultural change in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. His investigations in the Nushagak region included five seasons of archaeological work and resulted in seven books and monographs. In the midst of this research, Jim

returned to Chicago, becoming Curator of North American Archaeology and Ethnology for the Field Museum of Natural History, a position he held until his retirement in 1993. After completing the Nushagak studies, he turned his attention to the lower-middle Yukon, where he did two seasons of archaeological fieldwork. This work led to two major monographs, particularly *Ingalik Contact-Ecology: An Ethnohistory of the Lower-Middle Yukon, 1790–1935* (VanStone, 1979).

Before, during, and after the above major research efforts, Jim maintained a truly prodigious rate of scholarship and publication on a wide variety of subjects. He edited or translated a number of very important Russian works, among which the exploration accounts of Khromchenko (VanStone, 1973) and Kashevarov (VanStone, 1977) are particularly noteworthy. He was a major contributor and organizer for two volumes of the *Handbook of North American Indians* (on the Arctic and Subarctic) and also found time to serve as an associate editor for *Arctic Anthropology*. At the Field Museum, VanStone produced a wide range of studies from the museum's collections and was the prime mover behind a major exhibition on Northwest Coast and Arctic peoples. He also served as scientific editor for *Fieldiana*, editing over 150 volumes on a wide range of subjects. He chaired the Anthropology Department at the Field Museum between 1970 and 1974.

In the course of his career, VanStone authored, co-authored, or edited more than 140 articles, books, and monographs. Although he formally retired in 1993, as a curator emeritus at the Field Museum he continued to do research and publish up to the time of his death. He kept telling friends that he was finished with the work he had to do, yet kept coming up with new projects. A nearly complete list of his publications can be found in the *Arctic Anthropology* festschrift, *No Boundaries: Papers in Honor of James W. VanStone* (Pratt et al., 1998).

Beyond his individual scholarship, VanStone's personal and professional relationships with Russian scientists were important in maintaining connections between researchers on different sides of the Bering Strait. In the late 1970s, he led a U.S. team in a joint Soviet-American working group sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. The group's efforts resulted in three successful symposia before relationships deteriorated in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Later, VanStone played a key role in facilitating the Smithsonian's "Crossroads of Continents" exhibit and made several trips to Russia for that project.

For those who knew him as a friend, mentor, or colleague, it was Jim's personal characteristics that made him an important person. Those fortunate enough to have been his students found that he came to class prepared to dispense a huge volume of information, held together on page after page of single-spaced notes. He willingly read and commented on numerous pieces of student scholarship,

which were often neither literary nor scientific masterpieces. He treated the most inexperienced person as a colleague; all that was required was a shared passion for the anthropology of the North. For someone who might reasonably be entitled to be somewhat egotistical about his achievements, he was truly humble. In fact, when friends and colleagues contributed to the aforementioned issue of *Arctic Anthropology* in his honor, he could never be convinced that he truly merited the accolades.

Jim was a kind and thoughtful man, who could be counted on for a humorous barb if one got too big for one's britches. He was an old-fashioned letter writer who always returned one's correspondence. He had a truly stinky pipe that was always close at hand. He loved cats, college basketball, and the Chicago Cubs. In respect to the latter, he had characteristics that made him a good friend and true Cubs fan, being both optimistic and forgiving. He will be missed.

#### REFERENCES

- PRATT, K.L., SHEPPARD, W.L., and SIMEONE, W.E., eds. 1998. No Boundaries: Papers in Honor of James W. VanStone. *Arctic Anthropology* 35(2).
- VANSTONE, J.W. 1959. Russian exploration in interior Alaska, an extract from the journal of Andrei Glazunov. *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 50(2):37–47.
- . 1962. Point Hope: An Eskimo village in transition. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- , ed. 1973. V.S. Khromchenko's coastal explorations in southwestern Alaska, 1822. Translated by David H. Krauss. *Fieldiana: Anthropology* 64. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History.
- , ed. 1977. A.F. Kashevarov's coastal explorations in northwest Alaska, 1838. Translated by David H. Krauss. *Fieldiana: Anthropology* 69. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History.
- . 1979. Ingalik contact ecology: An ethnohistory of the lower-middle Yukon, 1790–1935. *Fieldiana: Anthropology* 71. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History.

*William L. Sheppard*  
980 SW Hillcroft Avenue  
Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.  
97225