

November 1, 1971

Dr. Frank C. Miller  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear Dr. Miller:

Over the past two years my association with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota has been extremely satisfying. As a member of a much respected department, I have enjoyed working with a group of active scholars at the forefront of anthropological research. I am grateful to everyone in the department for the kindness and encouragement that has been extended many times. I am particularly grateful to Professor Richard E. W. Adams, whose interest in my work made it possible for me to come here as a visiting assistant professor in the first place. I was very pleased when, during my first year here, you as Chairman, brought me the news that students were "commenting very favorably about my teaching" and that the staff felt that I had "great potential for making original contributions to archaeology." At that time I was offered the opportunity to continue teaching on a temporary basis. It was also communicated to me then that I was ranked very high and that I would be seriously considered when and if a more permanent slot became available.

At this time I became more involved and took on the responsibility of the Undergraduate Committee Chairmanship, which plunged me into the time-consuming and trying task of managing an orderly transition to the 5-credit module. Increasing interest in the affairs of the Department and the University accompanied my taking over of 1) Richard Currier's position as representative to the Latin American Studies Program, 2) Professor Ogan's position as representative to the CLA Instruction Committee, and 3) the Anthropology Honors Program. During this period I completed a major portion of my dissertation and saw through various stages of completion seven publications which are listed in my curriculum vitae.

Thus, it came as a great shock to learn that the staff had voted to terminate my association with the Department. Official notice came in a letter from you as Chairman. In discussion with staff members since then I have learned that the decision was based on three "deficiencies" in my performance. It is my understanding that consideration of these led the staff to reverse its earlier assessment of my performance.

These deficiencies were stated as follows: 1) my teaching of Method, Theory of American Archaeology was "shallow", 2) my Ph.D. dissertation was not progressing, and 3) my interests within the field were "too narrow."

With respect to the first deficiency, insofar as implications for my teaching are concerned, the data available were perhaps "incomplete" for a valid assessment of my total teaching ability. Further, it might be pointed out that course on which my performance was judged was offered during my first quarter here in the fall of 1969. I find it appalling that difficulties that a new professor may have had in judging "depth" at that time would be used to assess his capabilities two years later, particularly after having been informed that his first year of teaching had been highly satisfactory. As a means of presenting what is perhaps a more representative comment on my teaching I am submitting the results of three student course evaluations. While it is difficult to place any assessment of the results on an absolute scale, the evidence seems to suggest that my teaching skills are improving. I am sorry these data were not in my file at the time of the staff's assessment of me last spring.

The second deficiency in my performance apparently centered on the belief that work on my dissertation was not progressing. On the contrary, it has been progressing well. The dissertation is based on one of the largest and most intensive settlement surveys ever undertaken in the Maya Lowlands. Over 24 sq. km. of jungle around Tikal, Guatemala have been mapped. Mapping has resulted in nearly 57 meters of hand drawn maps, the first of which was sent to the University's photographic studios in March of this year, and the last of which was photographed in June. The additional time and care that was necessary to meet the overall requirements for publication of the maps in the Tikal Report series caused preparation to take considerably longer than had originally been intended.

The first draft of the text was presented in late August of this year to my chairman, Dr. William R. Coe, who expressed general satisfaction with the work and made helpful suggestions for modification. I am currently working on the second draft. The dissertation will be finished in December of this year.

As to the feeling that my interests and research are too narrow I would like the staff to examine the attached, up to date, curriculum vitae as a basis for judgment of my breadth of interests. The Tikal Sustaining Area Project which I directed at Tikal from 1965 through 1968 was not only broad in its approach but even interdisciplinary. Integrating the results of extensive surveys of settlement patterns, vegetation, soils, and topography, it has turned out to have broad implications for the economic, social, religious, and political organization of the ancient Maya.

My papers and publications have covered many subjects including prehistoric subsistence, the description of a defensive earthworks system, jungle mapping techniques, postclassic pottery, experimental archaeology as a technique for the investigation of "fossil" behavior patterns, and the



origins of Maya civilization itself. Presently I am working on an analysis of Mexican legends with John Ingham and a paper on the looting of Meso-american archaeological sites for a AAAS symposium being held in Philadelphia this winter. The course, Prehistory of Oceania, which I am offering for the third time this quarter is a direct result of a deep intellectual commitment to that area.

The Mexican government through INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropologia y Historia) has this year granted me a concession to the archaeological rights for a large portion of the state of Campeche as a part of an interdisciplinary study with Alfred Siemens on newly discovered ridged fields and canal systems on the Candelaria River. Preliminary reports on this work are already in press.

Here in Minnesota I was able to take a course in Palynology last spring in the Botany Department to assist me in interpreting the archaeological record as it is revealed in lake sediments. As a direct result of that experience I have started work on the analysis of a pollen core and conducted an interdisciplinary seminar with Herbert Wright and John Bradbury of the Geology Department.

On the basis of the above considerations including the additional information contained in my new curriculum vitae and the new data on my teaching performance, I respectfully request that the staff reconsider its previous action.

Respectfully yours,

Dennis E. Puleston

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