

October 26, 1971

Members of the Tenure Committee  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Gentlemen:

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 to me many times, and I am particularly grateful to Professor Richard E. Adams, whose interest in my work made it possible for me to come here as a visiting assistant professor in the first place. The ~~second~~<sup>first</sup> year of my teaching here ~~began~~<sup>ended</sup> with a pleasant surprise when Professor Miller brought me the news that students were commenting very favorably about my teaching and that the staff, including the Tenure Committee, 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 as an instructor until ~~more~~ permanent slot became available.

On this basis 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 Curriculum Committee, and 3) the Honors Program. During this active and productive year I also completed a major portion of my dissertation and saw through various stages of completion no less than five publications which are listed in my Curriculum Vitae.

Thus, it came as a great surprise to me to learn that the Tenure Committee had decided to terminate my association with this department.

Official notification of the decision came in a letter from Professor Miller which stated that the financial emergency in the University made any alternative impossible. Since that time, however, I have learned that the decision was based upon three supposed "deficiencies" in my performance. These, apparently, led the Committee to reverse its earlier assessment of my performance and to conclude that my capabilities as an instructor were low and that my potential was not substantial.

Apparently, these deficiencies were: 1) my teaching of the Method, Theory of American Archaeology course was "shallow;" 2) my Ph. D. dissertation and research were "not going anywhere;" and 3) my interests within the field were "too narrow." It is my contention that these suppositions are ill-founded and that the information used to assess them was incomplete, inaccurate, and irrelevant to a valid assessment of my performance.

With respect to the first deficiency, regarding my teaching ability, I wish to say that the procedure used to evaluate my performance during my second year seems questionable, particularly after I had been informed that my first year of teaching had been highly satisfactory. In this regard it should be noted that the course in question was offered during my first quarter here in the fall of 1969.

Apparently there was some suggestion that my teaching of the Method, Theory of American Archaeology course was shallow. This assessment, however, was based <sup>only</sup> on the comments made to another staff member by a "few" students. During the first quarter I received no feedback from other faculty members which might have helped me work out any shortcomings, particularly with respect to gauging the depth at which I could expect to level out with the capabilities of the typical Minnesota undergraduate. While the policy of the department has very explicitly been to allow instructors to judge the depth and content of their own courses, I feel that the lack of any sort of orientation or assistance for the new professor, who is left to work out things "on his own," is a tradition which ill-serves both students and the department. While it is regrettable that student complaints concerning my course were not referred to me personally, I find it appalling that any difficulties I might have had during that period would be used to judge me two years later.

Far from receiving any negative feedback, however, the Committee's decision to continue my appointment for a second year gave me every reason to believe ~~th~~ I was doing well. Many comments I received from students after completion of the course were also favorable. In an attempt to remove

consideration of my record from the realm of hearsay, I am submitting the results of the three student course evaluations. While it is difficult to place any assessment of the results on an absolute scale, I do believe that if they are arranged chronologically they suggest that my teaching skills are improving.

The second deficiency in my performance was the allegation that work on my thesis was not progressing. This can hardly be upheld in light of the fact that my dissertation is based on the mapping of over 24 sq. km. of the jungle and ancient settlement remains in and around Tikal, Guatemala, which *resulted* produced nearly 57 meters of hand drawn maps, the first of which was sent to the University's Photography Production Services in March of this year, and the last of which was *photographed* completed in June. Although these maps were virtually completed when I arrived at the University of Minnesota, I subsequently decided to prepare them in a final form to meet not only the standards for the dissertation but also the overall requirements for publication in the Tikal Report Series.

The first draft of the dissertation itself was presented in late August of this year to my Chairman Dr. William R. Coe, who expressed general satisfaction with the work and made some helpful suggestions for modification. I am currently working on a second draft which should be finished soon. I have every reason to believe that the dissertation will be completed by December of this year.

As to the feeling that my interests and research are <sup>400</sup> narrow, I would like to request that the Tenure Committee carefully consider what the definition of "varied interests" might be. Even a brief look at my Curriculum Vitae should suggest ~~that diversity of my interests.~~ An examination of my publications and papers should indicate that my interests are not only broad, but even interdisciplinary. The Tikal Sustaining Area Project, which I directed at Tikal during the period of 1965 through 1968, integrated the results of one of the largest mapping projects to be undertaken in the Maya Lowlands, with extensive surveys of vegetation, soils, and topography. All this is part of a larger study of the subsistence, settlement patterns, and cultural ecology of the ancient Maya of the southern Lowlands.

These studies can be contrasted to my publications and papers on the excavation and mapping of a defensive earthwork system, jungle survey techniques, Postclassic polychrome ceramics, experimental archaeology as a technique for the investigation of "fossil" behavior patterns, and the origins of Maya civilization. As further evidence of

diversity I might also point out that I am working on an analysis of Mexican legends with John Ingham and a paper on the looting and destruction of Mesoamerican archaeological sites for the annual meeting of the AAAS in Philadelphia this December. Moreover, my interest in Oceania is common knowledge among my colleagues. The course Prehistory of Oceania, which I am offering for a second time this quarter, stems from my involvement in the research ~~from~~<sup>in</sup> that area of the world.

Recently I have also begun work on an interdisciplinary project, in collaboration with a Canadian geographer, Alfred Siemens, which focuses on the investigation of newly discovered ridged fields and canal systems on the Rio Candelaria in Campeche, Mexico. The Mexican government, through INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropologia y Historia) has only this year granted me a concession to the archaeological rights for this region of Mexico. A preliminary report on work accomplished at sites in the region is already in press and appears in my Curriculum Vitae.

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~~ seminar with Herbert Wright and John Bradbury of the Geology Department.

On the basis of the above considerations I wish to request that the Tenure Committee reconsider my case ~~and~~ and, give that it becomes financially possible, rehire me on a two-year contract for 1972-1974.

Respectfully yours,

Dennis E. Puleston