

# Randall Theodore Milliken: A Focused Life<sup>1</sup> (19 September 1946–2 January 2018)

**JOHN R. JOHNSON**

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History  
2559 Puesta del Sol, Santa Barbara, California 93105

**RICHARD E. HUGHES**

Geochemical Research Laboratory  
20 Portola Green Circle, Portola Valley, California 94028-7833

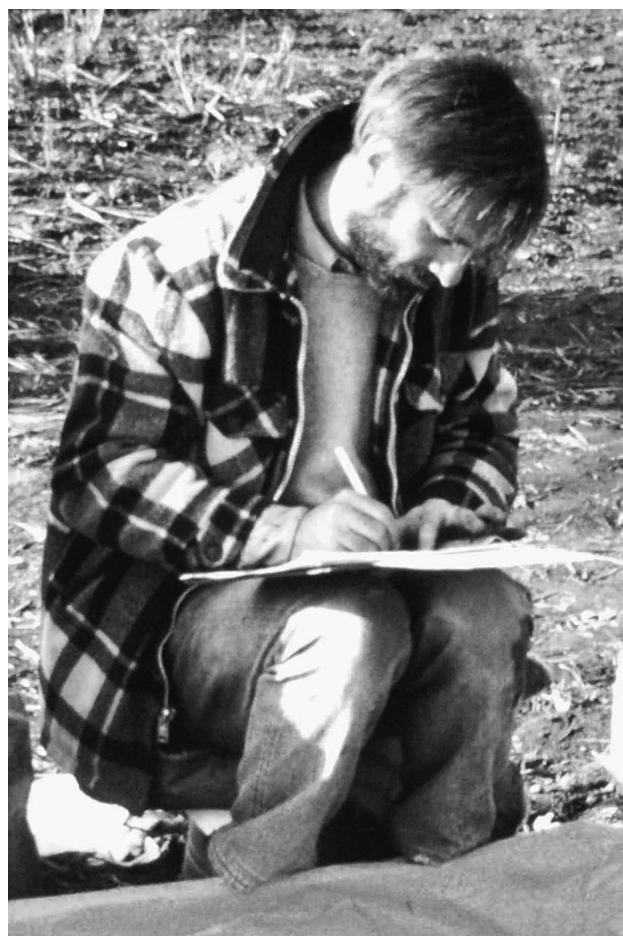
**PATRICIA MIKKELSEN**

Far Western Anthropological Research Group  
2727 Del Rio Place, Suite A, Davis, California 95618

**R**ANDY MILLIKEN WAS AN ECCENTRIC GENIUS, as anyone who ever came into contact with him knows. He will be remembered and honored for his in-depth, focused research on Spanish mission registers, Bay Area archaeology and ethnography, California ethnogeography, shell bead and ornament typology and chronology, and material conveyance, as well as for his willingness to share data.

Randy began his mission register studies as a hobby when he became interested in the native people of Contra Costa County. Learning that microfilms of the Spanish registers covering the late 1770s were at the St. Mary's College library in Moraga, he immersed himself in the details of native names, home villages, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. He began collecting data on Bay Area tribes, entering them all on 3 × 5 cards, and laying them out on the floor by family groups. By doing this kind of family reconstitution, Randy discovered the names of groups who intermarried. Early on he realized the potential of mission records for reconstructing the names, population sizes, and locations of local sociopolitical groups.

Based on this research, in 1976 Randy was asked to organize a seminar to share what he had been learning about ethnogeography with a number of archaeologists working in the region—Dave Fredrickson, Jim Bennyhoff, Bill Roop, Linda King, Chester King, Sonia Tamez, Tom Jackson, and Bob Gibson. They were intrigued, and as a result, Randy began finding jobs in cultural resource management, focusing on ethnohistorical studies for various projects. Within two years, he began the Master's program



Courtesy of Stephen A. Dietz, ca. 1980s.

in Cultural Resource Management at Sonoma State University, completing a thesis in 1983 entitled *The Spatial Organization of Human Population on Central California's San Francisco Peninsula at the Spanish Arrival*.

In a walking trip through Spain in 1984, Randy visited the birth places of Franciscan missionaries who had come to Alta California. The graduate program in Anthropology at U.C. Berkeley soon followed. He spent hours discovering and translating Spanish documents in the California archives at the Bancroft Library to reconstruct the mission-period history of the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Bay region, and began using computers to create an early version of his mission register database. Much of the research for his dissertation, completed in 1991, went into his book *A Time of Little Choice* (1995), a widely-consulted classic in California ethnohistorical studies.

Randy's ethnohistorical investigations continued unabated. Some of his research was published as books or chapters in edited volumes, while other substantive contributions were included in cultural resource management reports. A portion of Randy's legacy thus involves an accumulated body of work that reconstructs contact-period settlement geography throughout most of central California. Randy expanded and augmented his original mission register database, cross-referencing marriages, baptisms, and deaths for eleven missions in Alta California from San Miguel in the south to San Francisco Solano in the north. While he was working on an ethnogeographic study of Salinan and Northern Chumash communities, he joined his database to a similar one developed by John Johnson for southern California (Milliken and Johnson 2005). This initiated a project to empirically address the issue of the original population of Alta California.

In 2006, while Randy was conducting research on the ethnogeography of the Priest Valley region of Monterey County, he observed "that a focus on that one area required a reconstruction of native social geography for the entire South Coast Ranges, from the San Francisco Bay on the north to the San Luis Obispo/Santa Barbara county line on the south" (Milliken 2006a:1)—which he proceeded to do. He continued to expand this study as part of the Caltrans Transportation Enhancement Activities program, eventually formalizing it as the *Contact-Period Native California Community Distribution Model* (CDM), using all of his accumulated ethnographic, ethogeographic, and combined mission register data. As Randy described it in his overview Volume 1 of the CDM series:

The CDM atlas portrays a model distribution of 663 community *regions* (inferred or known village

communities or tribelets) across California on a GIS digital map layer, divided into 14 *analytical zones* that combine regions on the basis of mutual histories, shared language, and similar land-use patterns. The associated encyclopedia consists of "wiki" monographs that gather together archival information for each of the community regions (i.e., presented within a collaborative website that allows for creation and controlled editing of interlinked web pages). An additional key element, a Mission Register database, provides locational information for the CDM regions from which the people were entirely removed to the Franciscan missions between 1770 and 1835. These separate elements together form the CDM [Milliken 2010a:1].

His partially completed Wiki monographs provide detail on each region's linguistic groups, Western contact and disruption, classic and recent ethnographers, organization of landholding groups, mapping approaches, and constraints (see Milliken 2006b, 2010a, 2010b). His hope was that these topics would be expanded, modified, and annotated as new data were obtained. It was a massive undertaking, and it has now been left for others to complete. His database and papers are currently available in the Bancroft Library ([http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8qz2chq/entire\\_text/](http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8qz2chq/entire_text/)).

In early 1990, Randy's research expanded to shell bead typology, geographic distributions, and radiocarbon dating. In 1993, to refine the chronology of complex cultural changes in Central California prehistory, he collaborated with James Bennyhoff to write *Temporal Changes in Beads as Prehistoric California Grave Goods*. Some years later, he teamed with Al Schwitalla to publish the *California and Great Basin Shell Bead Guide* (2012), an indispensable reference for the classification and chronological implications of shell beads.

Sharing his extensive knowledge of and experience in California archaeology and ethnography, he co-authored two chapters in *California Prehistory* (Jones and Klar 2007). As lead author, while recognizing 13 co-authors who contributed to the compilation of data, he wrote *Punctuated Cultural Change in the San Francisco Bay Area*, which pulled together all that he had learned of Bay Area prehistory, covering "chronological and taxonomic issues, settlement systems, subsistence patterns, mortuary patterns, and physical anthropology...and the cycle of change in Bay Area prehistory—population growth, economic intensification, symbolic integration, conflict,

then crash” (Milliken et al. 2007:101). His chapter with Richard Hughes on *Prehistoric Material Conveyance* focused on shell beads and obsidian, making the case that prehistoric commodity exchange was not a unitary phenomenon, and that “prehistoric shell bead and ornament distributions, peaks and declines, are not isomorphic with those of obsidian, and the mechanisms responsible for observed distributions varied depending on a variety of contextual factors” (Hughes and Milliken 2007:270–271).

As someone acutely aware of the importance of primary data, Randy spent countless hours measuring beads; he was good at it, and his exposure and commitment to doing this detailed work gave him an appreciation for the real-life problems associated with what some assume is straightforward data generation. For example, just exactly *where* do you measure beads that are asymmetrical? Do you use maximum (or minimum) thickness for certain metrics? Which ones are diagnostic and which are mere artifacts of natural shell geometry? Does any of this matter if you don’t know the range of variation of the type, but since you can’t determine the range of variation until you’ve measured a lot of beads, you have to be clear and rigorous about the measurements you *do* take so they can be replicated.

Randy’s appreciation for, and insistence on, analytical detail is nowhere better exemplified than in the opening paragraphs of his discussion of typology in the *California and Great Basin Olivella Shell Bead Guide*. In it, he was emphatic that

*...naming beads by type is no substitute for reporting the metrical and non-metrical attributes of significant samples of beads from documented bead lots. It would be a misuse of this Guide if future archaeologists were to use it merely to name beads by type, list the counts in site report tables, or parrot the temporal significance information provided herein. It is critical that bead data continue to be reported...so that future analysts are able to refine the typology and better understand its temporal significance [Milliken in Milliken and Schwitalla 2012:6; emphasis in original].*

In 2018, Randy was honored by the Society for California Archaeology (SCA) and was presented with the David A. Fredrickson Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his status in the contemporary world of California Archaeology, and as a scholar who had contributed broadly and through a great deal of innovative

and original research to our understanding of prehistory and Native American cultural history. Not only was David Fredrickson one of Randy’s teachers at Sonoma State, they were also close friends and colleagues during Dave’s lifetime. In light of Randy’s lasting contributions to studies of the native people of our region, it was only fitting that he was a recipient of the award named for his longtime friend. Randy was also instrumental in establishing the SCA’s James A. Bennyhoff Memorial Fund, which since 1995 has provided thousands of dollars to support student research.

Randy approached all aspects of his research with enthusiasm, hard work, appreciation for and attention to detail, integrative insight, intellect, and acknowledgment and understanding of the importance of history. He was certainly opinionated, but he respected informed arguments and was quite willing to change his mind if persuaded by actual data; he evaluated arguments, a characteristic of a true scholar. Randy’s work was extensive and intensive, with always an eye to broader archaeological and anthropological implications. But he had an additional quality that was special. Like Jim Bennyhoff, Randy’s predecessor and mentor in integrating mission register data with California archaeological data, he had a knack for seeing patterns—even some the master himself hadn’t recognized. Randy was one of the few individuals we’ve known who possessed the skill sets required to see the forest *and* the trees.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>For additional biographical information about Randall Milliken and anecdotes about his life, see the June 2018 issue of *California Archaeology* 10(3):121–128.

## MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

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