

SOUTHEASTERN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE BUSINESS MEETING 2020
COMMITTEE/TASK FORCE ANNUAL REPORTS

Patty Jo Watson Award Committee Report
Submitted by Natalie Mueller
October 2020

The 2020 Patty Jo Watson Award committee consisted of Natalie Mueller (chair this year), Casey Barrier, and S. Margaret (Maggie) Spivey. We reviewed all of the papers in the 2019 issues of *Southeastern Archaeology*, plus two outside nominees. We have unanimously agreed that one of these outside nominees deserves to win the award this year: "Talking Stones: Cherokee Syllabary in Manitou Cave, Alabama" by Beau Duke Carroll, Alan Cressler, Tom Belt, Julie Reed, and Jan F. Simek, published in *Antiquity* in 2019.

This paper was nominated by David Anderson, who wrote of it, "The paper is authored by a multidisciplinary team led by Beau Carroll, an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians working in their Tribal Historic Preservation Office. This paper is a summary and expansion of his MA thesis *Talking Stone: Cherokee Syllabary Inscriptions in Dark Zone Caves*. The paper is a remarkable study showing how Manitou Cave was regarded by early 19th century Cherokee as a spiritually potent place where wall embellishment, including both images and texts, were actively linked to ritual and cosmological matters. A second important aspect of the paper is the convincing demonstration that collaboration between archaeologists, historians, and Native Cherokee scholars provided "a much richer understanding of the cave their meaning and historic context in terms of Cherokee memory and experiences" (p. 534). Manitou Cave's inscriptions include the name Richard Guess, thought to be one of Sequoyah's sons. More importantly, his name was likely there because he was a participant in if not leader of ceremonies that were occurring in the cave. Some of the syllabary on the cave walls appears to refer to spiritual beings, or 'Old Ones' living in or behind the walls, while other writing refers to ceremonies likely related to a stickball contest. The cave was thus a powerful place where participants ritually isolated, prepared, and purified themselves. The paper offers an interpretation not only on how the Cherokee who wrote the texts were using the cave, but also a method for better understanding how native peoples may have used them in much earlier times. The work demonstrates the kind of positive accomplishments that can come from collaborations between archaeologists, historians, photographers, and Native peoples."

We fully agree with this endorsement. We evaluated the papers based on their use of archaeological theory to link data to a convincing interpretation, excellence of writing, contribution to solving a problem of broad significance, be it academic or applied, and engagement with descendent communities and other stakeholders. Maggie wrote, "This paper is inherently compelling. Interdisciplinary, Indigenous-led, and simply interesting," while Casey thought that this paper "not only presents interesting information on syllabary, but also links briefly to larger ideas about caves as ritual spaces. Sensitivity is shown to present information while not revealing secret and sacred ritual texts, which provides a method for how researchers go about this in the future. The collaboration between indigenous and non-indigenous scholars is rewarding and an excellent contribution." I found this paper to be a fascinating and novel read, poignantly offering insight into Cherokee ritual practice during a time of crisis, while also providing insights into how caves may have been used and imagined in ancient

times. I am also impressed that this paper grew out of an MA thesis, and believe that Carroll deserves recognition for this ambitious contribution.

We are delighted to recommend "Talking Stones" as the winner of the Patty Jo Watson Award in 2020.