

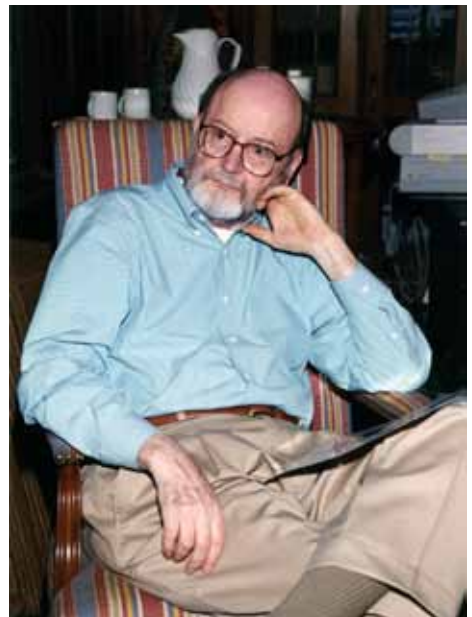
William Sumner, Director Emeritus, Oriental Institute

William M. Sumner, a leading figure in the study of ancient Iran and director of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago from 1989 to 1997, died July 7, 2011, in Columbus, Ohio. Sumner, who oversaw a major expansion of the Institute's building, was 82.

Sumner, a resident of Columbus, was a 1952 graduate of the United States Naval Academy. He served in the Navy until 1964, rising to the rank of lieutenant commander.

He developed his interest in archaeology during naval service in the Mediterranean. Visits to ancient sites in Italy and Greece inspired him to pursue a graduate education. While serving in Iran, he developed a keen interest in that country's ancient civilization and he pursued that interest by taking a class taught at Tehran University by Ezat Ngahban, a professor there and a graduate of the University of Chicago.

Sumner resigned from the Navy to pursue graduate work in anthropology. He received his PhD from Pennsylvania in 1972 and was a member of the anthropology faculty at Ohio State from 1971 until he



IN MEMORIAM

joined the Chicago faculty as professor in the Oriental Institute and in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations in 1989.

“Bill Sumner was an outstanding archaeologist and a transformational leader at the Oriental Institute,” said Gil Stein, director of the Oriental Institute. “His survey and excavations at the urban center of Malyan in the highlands of Iran made a lasting contribution to our understanding of the Elamite civilization and the deep roots of the Persian empire. He trained an entire generation of archaeologists who went on to become major scholars in their own right in the study of ancient Iran and Anatolia.

“As director of the Oriental Institute, Bill Sumner had the vision, the drive, and the organizational skills to conceptualize and carry out the building of our new wing, and the complete reinstallation of our permanent Museum galleries. Most of all, Bill was a man with tremendous personal integrity, who led by example. His death is a sad loss for our field, and we will miss him very deeply,” Stein added.

At the Oriental Institute, Sumner encouraged the use of new technologies to expand the work of archaeologists in the field and in the laboratory.

“He saw the value, and sensed the impending importance of digital communication and publication, and laid the foundations for the next decade of development along these lines in the OI,” said Gene Gragg, professor emeritus at the Oriental Institute. Gragg succeeded Sumner as director.

Sumner recognized the value to archaeology and history of the use of computational technologies and scientific instrumentation. “Bill was a visionary, one of the first who understood the ways that digitalization and computational tools could transform the humanistic and social science disciplines,” said Martha T. Roth, the Chauncey S. Boucher Distinguished Service Professor of Assyriology in the Oriental Institute and dean of the Humanities Division. “And he was a scholar and person of deep personal and professional integrity.”

He also oversaw the initiation of the largest expansion of the Oriental Institute building since it was constructed in 1931. With the help of a federal grant and a \$10.1 million campaign, the Institute built a new wing to provide space for the equipment needed for climate control, as well as provide space for proper and climate-controlled artifact and archival storage. The new wing also houses a modern artifact conservation laboratory.

The Oriental Institute Museum also underwent a massive redesign that began under his leadership. That redesign led to a rearrangement of the galleries and an updated presentation of the Museum’s art and artifacts from throughout the ancient Middle East.

Sumner’s own academic work specialized on ancient Iran. From 1972 until 1978 he directed the University of Pennsylvania’s excavations at the site of Tal-i Malyan, ancient Anshan, in the Fars province in western Iran. Sumner oversaw the publication of a series of monographs based on the work of five field seasons of fieldwork there.

The Malyan archaeological project was seminal not only in discovering the highland Elamite city of Anshan, known locally as Malyan, but also in the cycles of nomadism and sedentism in the region of Fars, southern Iran, that operated in the region from at least fifth millennium BC, said Abbas Alizadeh, an Oriental Institute archaeologist who specializes on Iran.

In addition to his work on the Malyan monograph series, Sumner wrote many articles on the development of civilization in ancient Iran.