

IN MEMORIAM
William J. Robinson
1929–2021



Photo courtesy of Lab. of Tree-Ring Research (*University of Arizona*)

In the spring of 2021, dendrochronology and archaeology in the United States lost a giant. On April 26, 2021, William J. Robinson passed away quietly in his sleep. Born in Erie, Pennsylvania, on February 19, 1929, he served in the US Army from 1951 to 1953. Bill's love of the desert and for archaeology brought him to the University of Arizona where he received a PhD in Anthropology in 1967. During his more than 30 years as a professor and ultimately as Acting Director and Director of the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, Bill helped advance the use of dendrochronology to study archaeological sites throughout the Southwest and the United States. Bill was preceded in death by

Priscilla in 2013, after 56 years of marriage, and is survived by Peter Robinson (Deb Gardener), Betsey Robinson and his four beloved grandchildren, Ben, Graham, Rachel, and Ethan.

A quiet, soft-spoken scholar who will be sorely missed, Bill's contributions are many, both as a scholar and meticulous administrator. His early field experiences at the UA Archaeological Field School Point of Pines, at Spanish missions in southern Arizona, and in the Kayenta area of northeastern Arizona gave him a breadth of vision rarely seen today. His dissertation, entitled "*Tree-Ring Materials as a Basis for Cultural Interpretations*" was a landmark study that expanded dendroarchaeology

beyond simply chronology into understanding how people used wood and how those uses structure the archaeological tree-ring record. His broad research interests included the use of dendrochronology in Southwestern archaeology and in paleoclimatic reconstructions. He and his collaborators tree-ring dated such diverse places as Acoma Pueblo, Walpi Pueblo, Hubble Trading Post, and scores of Prehispanic archaeological sites across the Southwest. Bill joined the faculty of the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research in 1967 and was its Director from 1982 to 1986. As Director, Bill skillfully guided the LTRR through a particularly critical period in its history that could have dispersed its activities and in so doing helped lay the foundation for the existing unit. Working with colleagues from other institutions, Bill was instrumental in transforming LTRR's tree-ring-width measurement system from manual (key punch) input to digital data capture directly from measuring machines. Bill also served as Editor of the *Tree-Ring Bulletin* from 1969 to 1983 and of *The Kiva* from 1972 to 1975.

One of his most enduring legacies was his role in the seminal NSF-supported "Synthesis Project" (1963–1975) that, under Bill's supervision, reorganized and reanalyzed all the Southwestern archaeological tree-ring samples in the Laboratory's possession. He developed, authored, and co-authored the "Quadrangle Series," 16 volumes that presented every archaeological tree-ring date from the Southwest in a series of limited geographic areas. Although superseded as new dates became available, the Quadrangle Series was a key reference point for decades in the Southwest. Even prior to his attaining a faculty position, Bill's contributions to the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research were tremendous. His training both in archaeology and in museum studies enabled him to develop a catalog system for all the tree-ring samples collected by archaeologists in the Southwest. This was especially critical in the early 1960s when the LTRR was incorporating the large collections from other institutions that had ceased to operate, such as Gila Pueblo, the Museum of Northern Arizona, and the Laboratory of Anthropology. The incorporation of those large collections and reanalysis of them

allowed the LTRR to become the only archive of archaeological tree-ring samples in the United States, a position that it still holds today. Bill and one of us (Jeff Dean) also developed a series of paleoclimatic reconstructions using archaeological materials in the late 1970s, which set the stage for more detailed and elaborate reconstructions of climatic variables that went back prior to the ages of living trees or deadwood on the landscape. Following his retirement in 1993, Bill continued to contribute to the field of archaeology for ca. two decades as a volunteer with the non-profit Center for Desert Archaeology in Tucson.

—Contributed by Ronald H. Towner,
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SELECTED PUBLICATIONS OF WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

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- Robinson, W. J., B. Harrill, and R. L. Warren, 1974. *Tree-Ring Dates from New Mexico B, Chaco-Gobernador Area*. Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, University of Arizona, Tucson.
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- Harrill, B., W. Robinson, and R. L. Warren, 1973. *Tree-Ring Dates from New Mexico J-K,P,V Santa Fe-Pecos-Lincoln Area*. Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, University of Arizona, Tucson.