



**WILLIAM A. RITCHIE :: ARCHAEOLOGIST ::
(1903-1995)**

William Ritchie served as State Archaeologist for the State Museum and Science Service from 1949 until his retirement in 1972. He conducted his work throughout northeastern North America, discovering and excavating sites that revealed the history of the prehistoric peoples who lived in this region from 10,000 B.C. to the 1600s. Contrary to the popular assumption by historians that the Iroquois people migrated to the northeast from Ohio, Ritchie, through laborious field work spanning 47 years, believed that the Iroquois culture descended from the Owasco people that had been here for centuries.

Throughout his career, Ritchie conducted over 100 excavations of prehistoric sites, authored over 150 scientific papers and monographs and wrote several books on ancient Indian settlements in New York State. In fact, his textbook, *Archaeology of New York State* was still being used as a textbook by many schools over twenty years after its first edition was published in 1965.[1] Ritchie is credited as being the first person to use the word "Archaic," a term he applied to prehistoric hunter-gatherer sites in upstate New York [2].

After retiring in 1972, Dr. Ritchie "gave much of his time to supporting needed pro-environmental legislation to protect wildlife in New York state and elsewhere in the world. He was well known and respected by state and national legislators." [3]

BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

Ritchie was born in Rochester, NY. He received his bachelor's degree and master's degree from the University of Rochester. He earned his doctorate degree from Columbia University. Prior to joining the State Museum, Ritchie worked as an archaeologist and was curator of archaeology at the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Albany Times Union, "Getting Down to Earth: Longstanding Environmentalist Ritchie Honored," sec. C1, June 20, 1989.

[2] Sears, William, "What is Archaic?" *American Antiquity*, Vol. 14, no. 2. (Oct., 1948), 122.

[3] Albany Times Union, "Environmentalists Lose Friend, Tireless Worker," sec. E4, December 24, 1995.