

J. LOUIS GIDDINGS, ANTHROPOLOGIST

Professor at Brown, Expert
on Bering Strait, Dies

Special to The New York Times

PAWTUCKET, R. I., Dec. 9 — Dr. J. Louis Giddings, professor of anthropology at Brown University and a widely known authority on ancient inhabitants of the Bering Strait area of Alaska, died in Memorial Hospital here today. He was 55 years old.

Dr. Giddings was injured Nov. 3 in an automobile collision in nearby Seekonk, Mass. The hospital said that determination of the cause of death awaited an autopsy.

Dr. Giddings was born in Caldwell, Tex., on April 10, 1909. He was graduated from the University of Alaska in 1932, earned his master's degree from the University of Arizona in 1941 and his doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania in 1951.

Brown University named him director of its Haffenreffer Museum of the American Indian in 1956. He became interested in Bering Strait research as a University of Alaska undergraduate in 1931 and had spent many summers excavating archaeological sites at Cape Denbigh, on both sides of the Seward Peninsula and at Kotzebue Sound in Western Alaska. He had received frequent research grants from the National Science Foundation.

Studied Ancient Shores

One of his most recent efforts was the excavation of remains left by a succession of cultures at Cape Krusenstern, near Bering Strait. A series of 114 parallel ridges extends inland from the present shoreline, each representing a former — and earlier — beach.

These ancient beaches, Dr. Giddings found, constitute a sort of "guest book" recording the various peoples who once inhabited the coast.

He also was a pioneer in dendrochronology — the establishment of tree ring chronologies. Since the spacing of rings is an index of year-to-year climate, all trees that grew in the same region at the same time show the same pattern of fat and lean years. This makes it possible to determine the precise years when ancient logs grew.

Dr. Giddings and his wife, riding a skiff, once descended the Mackenzie River and skirted the Arctic Ocean, sampling ring patterns in driftwood in an effort to push the chronology as far into the past as possible.

Dr. Giddings's studies had led him to challenge the popular scientific concept of ancient mass migrations from Siberia through Arctic North America. His research exploited his thesis that there was a "circumpolar drift" of ideas and techniques all the way from Central Siberia to Greenland but no great migration of peoples.

Dr. Giddings leaves his wife, the former Ruth Warner, and three children, all of Bristol.

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