

Contact: Rachel Boon

**REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DEGREE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

**Action Requested:** Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to award an honorary Doctor of Science degree to Ms. Shirley Schermer at the Spring 2023 commencement.

**Details of Ms. Schermer's Accomplishments:** The University of Iowa would like to honor Shirley Schermer, who served as the University of Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist Burials Program founder and first director for 27 years. Ms. Schermer built an internationally recognized reputation for promotion of respectful treatment of human remains, especially those of Indigenous peoples.

During her career Ms. Schermer excelled in research, teaching, and public service. While Iowa-focused in her responsibilities, she was nationally and internationally recognized as a leader in promoting the respectful treatment of human remains while also engaging in scientific study. Her curriculum vita lists 142 publications including scientific reports, journal articles, and co-authored papers with nationally known scholars. Ms. Schermer was the principal investigator on 40 projects involving human skeletal remains (both Native American and non-native), and she has delivered 160 professional presentations to state, regional and national audiences. She received 16 grants from various agencies including the National Science Foundation, the National Park Service, the State Historical Society of Iowa, the Iowa Academy of Science, and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Ms. Schermer worked closely with Maria "Running Moccasins" Pearson, co-founder of the OSA Indian Advisory Council and recent award recipient of a Women of Achievement Award by the Iowa Women Lead Change organization, to establish a respectful and efficient working relationship implementing the Iowa Burials Law. Notably, their work became part of the inspiration for passage of the national Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and international efforts such as those by the World Archaeological Congress to establish effective repatriation policies.

Shirley's work in bioanthropology and archaeology is stellar. Among her more recent publications are co-editor and chapter author in several books including Household Economy at Wall Ridge: A Fourteenth-Century Central Plains Farmstead in the Missouri Valley published by The University of Utah Press (2020); Transforming the Dead: Culturally Modified Bone in the Prehistoric Midwest (2015) published by the University of Alabama Press; and Oneota Historical Connections: Working Together in Iowa published as OSA Report 24 (2015). Shirley also co-authored a chapter in The Routledge Handbook of Archaeological Human Remains and Legislation: An International Guide to Laws and Practice in the Excavation and Treatment of Archaeological Human Remains (2011).

The many co-authored publications demonstrate her commitment to multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. She was a collaborator, always reaching out to her colleagues in various institutions including scholars in regional universities as well as the Smithsonian Institution. Perhaps Shirley's most significant contribution to the UI and the profession was her caring interaction with Native Americans through her direction of the OSA Burial Program and coordination of OSA's Indian Advisory Council on behalf of the three State Archaeologists she

served under. Although of quiet demeanor, Shirley was a ferociously tenacious advocate. Shirley gained the trust of Indigenous groups that was the key to developing Iowa's highly acclaimed national model for the professional handling of ancient graves and related artifacts, as attested by Shirley's many Native American friends and colleagues. Award of an honorary degree for Shirley will call attention to the UI's on-going national leadership in perfecting an exemplary program that benefits Native Americans without compromising the goals of science.

Ms. Schermer's high national profile led her to be a member or chair of various organizations including Education Network Coordinator (Iowa) for the Society of American Archaeology (SAA), the preeminent archaeological professional organization in the world, for which she served on the Education Committee (11 years). She also chaired the SAA Public Education Committee State Network and served on the advisory board for 12 years. Ms. Schermer was appointed by the Governor to the State Preserves Advisory Board in 1991 and later served five years as chair.

Other board appointments include the Blood Run National Historic Landmark Committee; chair of the Anthropology Section of the Iowa Academy of Science; Mines of Spain advisory board; board of directors, Iowa Archeological Society; Jackson County (Iowa) Conservation board; and member of the Maquoketa Historic Preservation Commission. She has been honored for her service to the profession dating back to 1988 when she was named Citizen of the Year in Maquoketa, Iowa. In 1995, Ms. Schermer was included in the Plaza of the Heroines at Carrie Chapman Catt Hall at Iowa State University, and in 1995, she received the Keyes-Award from the Iowa Archeological Society.

There is no doubt that Shirley Schermer's dedicated efforts have strengthened the global reach of the University of Iowa making her well-deserving of this honor.