

John Allen Walthall



JOHN ALLEN WALTHALL, 79 years old, passed away peacefully on October 22, 2025 in Springfield, Illinois. John is survived by the love of his life and wife of 51 years, Nina Rowe Walthall, his son David Walthall, his former daughter-in-law Erin Goldsmith, his two grandsons Rhys and Brooks Walthall, his sister Mary Flemming (Tom), and many loving family members and friends.

John, an archaeologist, was born on January 23, 1946, in Birmingham, Alabama. His parents were John Thomas and Kathryn Clayton Walthall. John graduated from the University of Alabama in 1968. His first field experience took place in the summer of 1966 when he worked on an archaeological dig in the Buttahatchie Valley of northwestern Alabama, directed by Professor David L. DeJarnette. He earned an M.A. or M.S. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 1970, and his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1973. While in graduate school, John participated in archaeological fieldwork in the central Mississippi Valley, the southern



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He served as a professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa for several years. Yes, he did meet and shake hands with Bear Bryant. While there, he authored the book, "Prehistoric Indians of the Southeast" (University of Alabama Press, 1980, paperback edition, 1990), which became a standard reference for regional archaeologists and students.

In 1977, John became the first Chief Archaeologist for the joint Illinois Department of Transportation / University of Illinois Cultural Resources Program. He served in this role for 34 years, retiring in January 2012. During this period, he managed some of North America's most significant archaeological projects, including several major excavations at and around the Cahokia Mounds site. This work culminated in the 2008-2016 excavations conducted before constructing a new bridge spanning the Mississippi River into St. Louis (named the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge). Over 1,500 Cahokia-related houses were discovered during this project.

This excavation project, carried out in collaboration with the Osage Nation, revealed that Cahokia was not merely a ceremonial center, as previously believed, but was once a vast prehistoric city between AD 1,000 and 1,300. During that period, it was more significant than contemporary London. This discovery was recognized as one of the world's most important archaeological projects and received the 2016 Shanghai Archaeology Forum International Field Discovery Award.

During his 50-year career in archaeology, John Walthall authored and edited a dozen books on the Archaeology of Prehistoric America, French Colonial Illinois, and the American Frontier, as well as approximately 50 journal articles and book chapters (see his publications page at: <https://il.academia.edu/JohnWalthall>).

He served as an adjunct Professor of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, for more than 20 years. He was a research archaeologist at the Illinois State Museum for much of that time. In a Journal of Illinois Archaeology volume honoring John on his retirement, Kenneth B. Farnsworth of the Illinois State Archaeological Survey stated that "During the past 30 years, no one has done more than John Walthall to shape, define, and contribute to new fundamental discoveries and interpretations in Illinois archaeology." At the 2008 annual conference in Vancouver, B.C., the Society for American Archaeology awarded John Walthall a Lifetime Achievement Award for his career accomplishments.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in John's name may be directed to The Forever Home Feline Ranch (<https://felineranch.org/Donate/>) or the Animal Protective League (<https://www.apl-shelter.org/donate>). A private family ceremony will be held at a later date.



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