

# Allan Richard Holmberg

*October 15, 1909 — October 13, 1966*

In the untimely death at fifty-six of Allan Holmberg, Henry Scarborough Professor of Social Sciences, mankind lost a loyal friend; his professional world of anthropology, a leading innovator; and his Cornell colleagues, a distinguished scholar whose contributions to the development of the University extended beyond the wide reaches of his discipline.

A young Quechua Indian attending the new village high school in the Peruvian Andes shyly told our visiting University Provost, "Dr. Holmberg is my good friend." His fellow anthropologists in 1958 elected Holmberg president of the American Ethnological Society; and an eminent Cornell physicist took courses with him and wrote that Holmberg had been "a very strong influence" on his thought for over a decade.

Professor Holmberg's cultural roots were deep in a progressive midwestern and liberal Swedish background. He was born in Renville, Minnesota, the second son and sixth of eight children of Axel and Anna Carlson Holmberg. He attended primary school there; graduated from high school in Stillwater, an honor student and president of his class; and in 1935 received his B.A. in anthropology and psychology from the University of Minnesota. He was brought up in a farming-community tradition of hard work, being in part or wholly self-supporting from the age of ten, whether as a grade school boy in charge of the horse and wagon deliveries for a grocer, as a high school member of threshing crews ranging west to North Dakota and Saskatchewan, or in Minneapolis working his interrupted way through the University as a seeds salesman or a night shift hospital orderly (an experience which led him to change his original plan to enter medicine).

Holmberg was first attracted to anthropology through work with the philosopher-anthropologist Wilson Wallis at whose urging he returned to Minnesota for graduate study in anthropology and philosophy. A scholarship in anthropology at Chicago, which had an outstanding department under Fay-Cooper Cole (the father of Cornell's Professor of Ecology), took him there in 1937 to work with Cole, Robert Redfield, and others. In 1938, he accepted a research position in the Institute of Human Relations at Yale, and it was there that he received his final doctoral training under B. Malinowski, G. P. Murdock, Edward Sapir, and Alfred Metraux, the last being responsible for his interest in Latin America.

In 1940, Holmberg was awarded a Social Science Research Council Fellowship which would support his doctoral dissertation research in Bolivia for two years. But the war extended his stay in Latin America to almost five years:

he briefly served the American Embassy in La Paz and then the Rubber Development Corporation in its collection of wild rubber in the Amazon basin, receiving special commendation for getting out the largest quantity of this commodity obtained in any world-area during the war. In 1945, he returned to the United States to marry Laura Hines, whom he had met in Bolivia, and who survives him with their three children, Anna, David, and Eric. As a Sterling Fellow in Anthropology at Yale he completed his thesis on the Siriono Indians during 1945-46; and he received his Yale doctorate in 1947 while serving in Peru on the staff of the Institute of Social Anthropology of the Smithsonian Institution and as Professor of Anthropology at the National University of San Marcos in Lima.

It was in the following year, 1948, that Allan Holmberg accepted with enthusiasm and faith an invitation to join the Cornell faculty and participate in the novel program in applied anthropology which had recently been established at Cornell with the aid of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Thus he began eighteen years of dedicated service to applied anthropology under the aegis of these and other institutions. His consulting relations with officers of the Carnegie Corporation—Charles Dollard, John Gardner, James Perkins— were of mutual value as the foundation developed its special interests in Latin America during the 1950's.

At Cornell, Holmberg's assignment was to aid four colleagues in developing a full teaching program in cultural anthropology on the campus; and to establish somewhere in Latin America a field-research and training project in applied anthropology which could be compared with other Cornell anthropology projects in New Mexico, Nova Scotia, India, and Thailand. After carefully deciding on the basis of surveys against a long-term program in either Mexico or Venezuela and on presenting alternative plans for work in Peru, Holmberg was appointed in 1949 director of the now famous Cornell-Peru Project, given authority and funds to proceed, and in 1951 received faculty tenure as his project became firmly established in Vicos and Lima.

Under Allan Holmberg's able direction the Peru Project led directly or indirectly to other developments at Cornell. By the mid-1950's the number of graduate students and colleagues working on Latin American problems at Cornell was so considerable that in effect an interdisciplinary area program existed, comparable to those in Asian Studies to which Cornell had given priority. Holmberg was the key figure in the developments which led to today's outstanding Cornell-Latin American Program; he attracted students and new faculty, contributed ideas, and judiciously used a Carnegie grant received in 1959 for Andean Research to add strength to Cornell's growing Latin American resources. Another Carnegie grant in 1960 enabled Cornell, Columbia, Harvard, and later Illinois to embark on summer programs of field instruction in anthropology in Latin America for selected undergraduates, with Holmberg in charge of the Cornell programs. He was also responsible somewhat later for bringing to Ithaca

a Peru Peace Corps training program; and in 1962 he began a Cornell study to measure the impact of Peace Corps programs in the Peruvian Andes, reporting in 1966 that these had a definite beneficial effect. From 1963 to 1966, Holmberg was in charge of a series of Cornell special studies of Andean Indian communities for the Agency for International Development.

The wide range of Holmberg's Latin American training and research projects made him a particularly useful member of a number of Cornell committees. These included the executive committee, Social Science Research Center, 1953-56, chairman, 1955-56; advisory board, Cornell Program in Social Psychiatry, 1958-65; President's committee on the evaluation of the College of Agriculture, 1963; Provost's committee on overseas commitments, 1963-66; executive committee and modernization workshop, Center for International Studies, 1964-66; and committee on water resources research, 1964-66. In 1958, he was elected to the Faculty Research Club.

A Cornell task which Holmberg assumed willingly and found most challenging was provided during his tenure on the University library board, 1956-61, a period of much travail when the Olin Research Library was being planned and replanned.

To the development of the field of anthropology at Cornell, Allan Holmberg contributed not only his teaching and research but also his wise counsel. When a separate Department of Anthropology was established in 1962, he was chosen as its chairman, serving until 1966. For the new department he helped obtain a National Institutes of Health Training Grant under which a laboratory in physical anthropology and archaeology was equipped. He also organized under an Agency for International Development contract a series of comparative studies of cultural change based on the work in applied anthropology in Peru, India, and Thailand, developed during his early Cornell years.

By the time Allan Holmberg came to Cornell in 1948, he had already carried on field researches that were to bring him national and international attention. In his doctoral research from 1940 to 1942, he endured incredible hardships to live among and study the Siriono, an isolated hunting and gathering group of the tropical forests of eastern Bolivia. During this expedition he was already beginning to "experiment with culture." The monograph which resulted, *Nomads of the Long Bow*, is recognized as a psychological and philosophical contribution as well as an important contribution to ethnography; and it has been a center of interest and debate since its publication.

From 1946 until 1948, he carried on field work in Peru which further developed his interest in the application of anthropology to practical problems of cultural change. Later, as a Cornell faculty member, he returned to Peru to

expand the research interests he had previously initiated. The result was the Vicos project, which not only became noteworthy as a training ground for social science research but also became famous as an example of the role that applied anthropology can play in the improvement of health, education, economic productivity, self-government, and morale among peasant peoples in a developing area.

As a result of the success of the programs which he guided in Latin America, Holmberg was in constant demand on national advisory bodies, and he gave generously of his time. He served as a member of the Latin American science board and of the committee on overseas studies in the behavioral sciences of the National Academy of Sciences, as a member of the committee on Latin America of the Institute of International Education, as a member of the Latin American committee of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, and as a member of both the economic committee and the research advisory committee of the Agency for International Development. In addition, he served on a special panel of the President's scientific advisory committee, acted as consultant to the Ford Foundation in connection with its foreign area training program, and sat on the committee on the social psychology prize of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In February, 1963, he was a U.S. delegate to the United Nations Conference in Switzerland on the application of science and technology in benefit of the less developed areas; and during the following summer at M.I.T. he met with a national study group on agricultural productivity in underdeveloped countries. He was named a member of the committee on international studies of the New York State Department of Education in 1963.

These memberships and services took Allan Holmberg across disciplinary lines and into fruitful contact with natural scientists, economists, educators, psychologists, and administrators. Yet he received high recognition from his special professional field, anthropology. At Yale he was one of the few anthropologists elected to Sigma Xi. He was one of the first anthropologists to be invited for a fellowship year at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Palo Alto. He guided a major reorganization of the Society for Applied Anthropology and served as its treasurer and on its editorial board for several years. His many publications in the field of anthropology were well received by his peers and are constantly cited.

One can catalog Allan Holmberg's honors and achievements, but, impressive as they are, the man was something more. His associates will always remember his quiet humor, his modesty, his consideration for colleagues, his concern for students, his belief in the effectiveness of social knowledge, and his respect for human beings everywhere.