

IN MEMORIAM: *Christon I. Archer, 1940–2021*

Born and raised in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, Christon Irving Archer first developed an interest in things Hispanic as he wondered about the Spanish place names along the British Columbia coast. He earned his BA at the University of Victoria, where professors supported his interest in Latin America. In 1965, he went on to do graduate work at what is now Stony Brook University.

Those were halcyon days in our field, and growing universities like Stony Brook invested generously in their graduate students, buying the books they needed for their research and even providing official state cars for what Archer recalled as memorable research trips to Columbia University or the New York Public Library. At Stony Brook, he worked under the supervision of Stanley R. Ross and Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, who steered him to colonial Mexican history. His interest in military history derived from the stories of family members' service in the British and Canadian armies during the First and Second World Wars and he was soon researching the voluminous records of Bourbon New Spain's armed forces in Mexican and Spanish archives.

Archer joined the faculty at the University of Calgary in 1969, well before he defended his dissertation in 1971 (as was common at the time). This new university, recently created out of the University of Alberta's Calgary campus, would be his professional home for 41 years, until his retirement in 2010. Archer was a leader in the generation of Calgary scholars who pioneered the university's connections with Mexico and the rest of Latin America. He went on to make instrumental contributions to the founding of both the university's Latin American Studies (LAST) program and its Latin American Research Centre (LARC) in the 1990s and early 2000s; he directed the latter from 2004

Hendrik Kraay received his PhD from the University of Texas at Austin in 1995 and has taught at the University of Calgary since 1997. He is the author of *Race, State, and Armed Forces in Independence-Era Brazil: Bahia, 1790s–1840s* (2001) and *Days of National Festivity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1823–1889* (2013), both published by Stanford University Press. His most recent monograph, *Bahia's Independence: Popular Politics and Patriotic Festival in Salvador, Brazil, 1824–1900*, was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2019.

to 2010. He also served as head of the Department of History from 1986 to 1991, and was the founding editor of the University of Calgary Press's Latin American and Caribbean book series.

The book based on his dissertation, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico, 1760–1810* (1977), won the Bolton Prize (now Bolton-Johnson Prize) from the Conference on Latin American History. It was translated into Spanish and issued in Mexico by the Fondo de Cultura Económica in 1983. Published almost simultaneously with monographs on the military in colonial Peru and New Granada by Leon G. Campbell and Alan J. Kuethe, Archer's book joined theirs in reevaluating Lyle McAlister's thesis that Bourbon reformers' expansion of the *fuero militar*, the legal jurisdiction and corporate privileges of military men, led to post-independence militarism in Spanish America. *The Army in Bourbon Mexico* also pioneered a new military-history approach to the late colonial army with chapters on recruitment, discipline, and conditions of service. As Archer explained in a 2011 interview, "El ejército representa para mí, más o menos un 'túnel' que puede darnos acceso a cada aspecto de la sociedad. Es una ventana a la sociedad, porque los soldados provienen de las diferentes clases de la población, de manera que surgen y llegan de todas las regiones, ciudades y pueblos del país."¹

As *The Army in Bourbon Mexico* neared publication, Archer returned to what had originally sparked his interest in Spanish imperial history—the Spanish exploration of the Pacific Northwest. A flurry of articles and book chapters from 1973 to 1981 suggested that he had changed his research focus to this new field, in which he discovered significant Mexican connections to the Pacific Northwest and analyzed diverse topics like explorers' perceptions of Indigenous people and the impact of smallpox.

Mexico nevertheless had its hold on him and soon pulled him back to continue research, now on the independence period. Archer had, in fact, initially contemplated doing his dissertation on the royalist army in the 1810s. The royalist army's organization and its military victory over the insurgents profoundly shaped Mexico's independence and new state; these issues became the dominant focus of his research for the second half of his career. From the late 1980s, he contributed to what seemed to be just about every edited book on late colonial and early national Mexican politics. He edited two volumes himself, *The Wars of Independence in Spanish America* (2000) in Scholarly

1. Jarco Amézcuca Luna, "Entrevista a Christon Archer: El ejército realista y la Guerra de independencia de México," *Tzintzun: Revista de Estudios Históricos* 53 (January-June 2011): 140.

Resources' Jaguar Books on Latin America series, and *The Birth of Modern Mexico, 1780–1824* (2003), also published by Scholarly Resources.

Teaching in a department that had a strong cohort of military historians, Archer was able to set his work on the Mexican military into a larger context. His application of counterinsurgency scholarship to the problems faced by the government of New Spain in the 1810s influenced students of military history. With John R. Ferris, Holger H. Herwig, and Timothy H. E. Travers, he coauthored *World History of Warfare* (2002), for which he wrote the early-modern chapters.

Colleagues and former students describe Archer as a larger-than-life figure, a kind mentor to junior faculty and graduate students, and a supportive colleague to all. He had an enormous presence in the profession, particularly in the Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies, whose annual conference he rarely missed. He published extensively in Mexico and is widely recognized by Mexican historians as a pioneering scholar in colonial and Independence-era military history, one who was willing to study seriously often reviled figures like Antonio López de Santa Anna and Félix María Calleja del Rey. He was president of the XII Reunión de Historiadores Mexicanos, Estadounidenses y Canadienses, held in October 2006 in Vancouver, with a theme that referred to one of his long-standing interests: “Costas y fronteras en la historia de México.”

A born storyteller, Archer regaled generations of students at the University of Calgary with tales about Latin American history and vivid accounts of life in early modern armies and navies. For most of his time at the University of Calgary, the Department of History's graduate program did not offer a PhD degree. He supervised 22 MA theses and at least five of their authors went on to complete doctorates; four now teach at universities in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. He was also a mentor and advisor to many other undergraduate and graduate students, and supervised one PhD dissertation.

Few could match Archer's inimitable style as he recounted his research adventures, which included seaplane trips along British Columbia's coast to visit the locales that Spanish explorers lent their names to more than two centuries ago. These stories always included tales of lively dinners and other celebrations. He loved his native Vancouver Island and regularly spent summers on his property in the Cowichan Valley.

Chris's wife of 56 years, Carol, joined him on many research trips as his “favorite research assistant.” She developed her own interest in history, and after retiring

from the Calgary Board of Education, she entered the graduate program at the University of Calgary, earning an MA in 2006 and a PhD in 2014.²

Chris passed away on December 19, 2021, after a long illness. He is survived by Carol and his daughter Katherine (Lars), son John (Christin), and five grandchildren. He will be missed by his many friends and colleagues in Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Spain.

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2. Carol Archer, “El Amparo de la Ley’: Hispanas’ Use of Spanish Mexican and Anglo-American Law in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado, 1848–1912” (PhD diss.: University of Calgary, 2015).