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Alan C. Swedlund Papers

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Read collection overview

Born in Sacramento, Calif., and raised in Colorado, the biological anthropologist Alan C. Swedlund received each of his degrees at the University of Colorado Boulder (PhD, 1970). After a brief stint at Prescott College, Swedlund joined the faculty at UMass Amherst in 1973, where he helped to develop the doctoral program in biological anthropology and chaired the department for five years in the early 1990s. A prolific scholar, he drew upon diverse methodologies drawn from demography, epidemiology, and physical anthropology to explore interactions between cultural processes and human biological conditions in populations ranging from the Ancient Pueblo of the southwestern United States, to contemporary Central America and Yucatan, and historical New England. Among dozens of publications, he was author or editor of seven books, including *Shadows in the Valley: A Cultural History of Illness, Death, and Loss in New England, 1840-1916* (2010), *Plagues and Epidemics: Infected Spaces Past and Present* (2010), and *Beyond Germs: Explorations of Indigenous Depopulation in North America* (2015). He was granted emeritus status upon his retirement in 2008.

The Swedlund papers include extensive professional correspondence from his first professional appointment at Prescott College through the time of his retirement, along with numerous grant applications, unpublished papers and talks, and research data. Of particular note are extensive records and data files for his study of nineteenth-century demography in the Connecticut River Valley and Franklin County, Mass.

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Background on Alan C. Swedlund

The biological anthropologist Alan C. Swedlund was born in Sacramento, Calif., and raised in Colorado, earning his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the University of Colorado Boulder (1966, 1969, and 1970, respectively). His first teaching appointment was as an assistant professor at Prescott College, in Arizona. After three years there, Swedlund joined the faculty at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1973. At the time, anthropology was still new as an independent department, having been part of the

Department of Sociology and Anthropology since the 1950s (anthropology as an undergraduate major had been introduced in the mid-1960s). Swedlund's initial appointment was as a teaching fellow; he stayed for the whole of his career, albeit with numerous other appointments as a visiting professor or scholar. At UMass, he helped to develop the doctoral program in biological anthropology and, for five years in the early 1990s, chaired the department.

A prolific scholar, with particular interest in population and health in prehistoric, historical, and contemporary settings, Swedlund took a biocultural approach to his topics, drawing upon diverse methodologies drawn from demography, epidemiology, and physical anthropology, and focusing on interactions between cultural processes and human biological conditions. In the Southwestern United States, he has studied issues of population aggregation and expansion of Puebloan (Anasazi) groups, and related inferences about health using skeletal biology and modeling. In the eastern Yucatan, he consulted on a project on the biological impacts of tourism in Mayan communities in Quintana Roo. And in his adopted region of New England, Swedlund has made extensive use of historical records of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing on a series of communities in Massachusetts' Connecticut Valley and their demographic, economic, and health transitions. Seeking to pinpoint such transitions and connect them to social, economic, and environmental factors, his research has emphasized mortality of infants, children, and women.

Swedlund is author or editor of books and monographs including *Shadows in the Valley: A Cultural History of Illness, Death, and Loss in New England, 1840-1916* (2010), *Plagues and Epidemics: Infected Spaces Past and Present* (2010), and *Beyond Germs: Explorations of Indigenous Depopulation in North America* (2015). He contributed many journal articles and book chapters as well. The recipient of numerous grants and awards, in 2003 he was awarded UMass's highest honor, the Chancellor's Medal. Swedlund retired in 2008, with emeritus status, and has continued to conduct research, write, and lecture for both scholarly and general audiences.

Scope of collection

The Swedlund papers document the rich and active intellectual and academic life of Alan Swedlund. The collection includes extensive professional correspondence from his first professional appointment at Prescott College through the time of his retirement, along with grants and other material relating to his research particularly on the Connecticut Valley Project.

Series descriptions

[Series 1. Correspondence](#)

1971-2006

The correspondence spans Swedlund's professional life, from his time at Prescott College in Arizona through his long career at UMass Amherst.

[Series 2. Research and Teaching](#)

1975-2006

This series encompasses a range of material from Swedlund's work, including National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants, research files and data, notes and drafts of papers by graduate and undergraduate students working on the Connecticut Valley Project. His study of nineteenth-century demography in the Connecticut River Valley and Franklin County, Mass., is well represented by extensive records including vital records and data files.

Inventory

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Administrative information

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Provenance

Gift of Alan C. Swedlund, August 2019.

Processing Information

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