

## **Dr. Franklin H. Farmer: NASA Scientist and Founder of the Langley Research Center Historical and Archeological Society**

Sarah E. McCartney

Dr. Franklin H. Farmer was born in Maine in 1938. He attended Tufts University and received a B.S. in Biology in 1960. He continued his education at Virginia Polytechnic and State University in Blacksburg, graduating with a M.S. in Bacteriology in 1965 and a Ph.D. in Food Service and Technology in 1976. Dr. Farmer was employed by the United States Navy and served as a Commander in the Naval Reserves for twenty-eight years. He worked at NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia from 1965 to 2004.

Dr. Farmer was very active in genealogy and family history research, as well as history and archaeology projects in Maine and Virginia. During his career at NASA Langley Research Center, he was involved with numerous archaeological and historic preservation projects. In the 1970s, he organized the Langley Research Center Historical and Archeological Society, which had a membership of NASA employees. The society participated in the archaeological excavations at Chesterville Plantation, George Wythe's birthplace. Dr. Farmer worked on the project both as an excavator in the field and as a researcher. He corresponded extensively with experts in 18<sup>th</sup> century Virginia history and archaeology, and through his research and persistence, the Chesterville site was placed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

According to those who knew him best, Dr. Farmer had an eye for an archaeological site that was almost like a sixth sense. He could look at a piece of land and theorize about what might have stood there and why. In addition to researching historic documents and artifacts, Dr. Farmer also studied the methods and process of preserving the artifacts. His fascination with archaeology was more than a hobby, and he returned to school and received a M.A. in Anthropology from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg in 1985.

In addition to his interests in science, history, and archaeology, Dr. Farmer was an avid dancer. He learned ballroom dancing as a young man and added English Country Dancing, Contra Dancing and Scottish Country Dancing to his repertoire as an adult. He also enjoyed the outdoors, and often went on sailing and canoe trips with friends in his free time.

Dr. Farmer died at his home in Gloucester in 2007 after battling cancer. He actively pursued the study of history and archaeology, and also his love of dance, until his death. The NASA Langley Research Center is indebted to Dr. Farmer for his extensive research and documentation of Chesterville's history.



Dr. Farmer (center) accepting a plaque naming Chesterville a Virginia Historic Landmark