

## Anthropologist Alice Marriott

# A REAL PRO

By Patty Flood, '59



With typical good humor, noted anthropologist Alice Marriott models an 1850 New Mexican Indian water jug at O.U.'s Stovall Museum.

How a woman finds her life's work is a fascinating thing in itself. Some will begin to write poetry at the age of nine. A few will care for a wounded puppy and pursue their interest to medicine or nursing. But Alice Marriott, '35ba, had to do considerably more digging before she found her field.

Already the holder of a degree in English and history from Oklahoma City University, Miss Marriott discovered her first interest in anthropology while cataloguing a local museum collection in Muskogee. The late Grant Foreman, noted Oklahoma historian, was a member of the library board which hired her.

She went back to school here at O.U. for a 1935 degree in anthropology.

As a writer popularizing for the public what is generally reserved for anthropological journals, Miss Marriott has found a secure niche in a profession dominated by men. So popular have been her writings that some of her more conservative colleagues term her a writer and hesitate to concede her standing as a professional anthropologist.

(*Maria, the Potter of San Ildefonso*, has sold nearly 20,000 copies in seven printings since 1948.)

Miss Marriott is firm in her belief that there is a place for women in anthropology and its related fields. "After all," she says, "museum work is only housekeeping."

While Miss Marriott served as curator of ethnology at the University's Stovall Museum from 1957 to 1958, part of her job was to train student curators. Because of the tediousness of cleaning and repairing, the first prerequisite for training is a real devotion to the work.

Each specimen in a museum is different and calls for a different treatment. To repair an aging Navajo rug requires a different specialized knowledge than to refashion an implement of the Apache.

Curatorial work is something you learn by doing, Miss Marriott says. Manuals help and lectures give guidance, but the unusual situation calling for ingenuity is more often the rule.

A puzzler for Miss Marriott was how to clean a painted buckskin. Washing would run the colors and stiffen the hide. Commercial dry cleaning would do the same. Art gum eraser would help but was tedious and what's more who could afford enough art gum for a whole horse.

From the depths of the secret file that people in this profession seem to have, Miss Marriott recalled an art school trick mentioned by an illustrator friend. Bread. Nice white bread to clean pictures. With whole

loaves she took after the hide and removed the grime.

"That's not something you learn from a manual," she added.

In addition to the so-called housekeeping of anthropology, Miss Marriott sees new openings for women in pure research in the field. She cites that most of the anthropology is written by men for men. But 52 per cent of the population is composed of women.

"We have more than half the anthropology yet to write about," she reasons.

For the lady anthropologist there is the added advantage that women talk more easily to other women. The disadvantage in some cultures, such as the Hopi, is that the native women just don't know what the men do.

"Here I am faced with the problem of what am I to do if I am to show what the culture is really like," Miss Marriott explains. "If I am to retain the trust of the women, I can't pry. I feel the best thing I can do is to take what the women know and trust that a man (anthropologist) will be along to fill up the gaps."

A close friend of Miss Marriott, Carol Rachlin, on the staff of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, was a visitor in the anthropologist's home in Oklahoma City in November. She agreed with the Oklahoman and offered additional explanation of where women stand now in the profession.

Primarily the place for anthropologists has been in teaching on the college level, the subject not being taught in secondary schools. They could work in related fields—international relations, languages.

There were almost no women in the field at all until the 20's when under the guidance of Franz Boas of Columbia University, they began to make overtures in the profession. Still most of the women are engaged in teaching.

"With exceptions, of course," Miss Rachlin added. "Margaret Mead is one of the most noted. But her work considers the raising of children as an element of culture. The type subject matter that a woman anthropologist selects is usually within the realm of women." Miss Rachlin's own specialty is prehistoric fabric.

She continued about the specific field of archaeology. "It's practically impossible for a woman to be a dirt archaeologist. For the most part public institutions will not give a grant for a woman to dig." Here she noted exceptions of Frederica deLaguna of Bryn Mawr and Marjorie Lambert of the New Mexico Museum of Natural History.

Miss Rachlin and Miss Marriott concurred that women work more in ethnology,



This Kiowa beaded buckskin dress is one of the items obtained by Stovall Museum during the time Miss Marriott served as curator of ethnology.

linguistics and other very specialized fields. Miss Rachlin's formula for success is specialization. "If you know your field better than anyone else, your wares will sell better," she concluded.

Miss Marriott, who does extensive research in the field with the Indians as well as historical research, mentioned the basic problem of study. First she disregarded the personal element.

"Personal problems in the field are what I call bad technique," she said. "If you're a polite, well mannered person in one culture, you'll probably not have any trouble in another."

However, she added that transplanting yourself to another culture to study its structure is difficult, and that adjusting from one culture to another, neither of which is your own, has even more problems.

Miss Marriott's first field experience was with the Kiowas, who are historically nomadic. The nation is one of extroverts, a people who are direct and forthright in all they do.

The war years intervened, and Miss Marriott was occupied with defense work.

"When I returned I wanted to find the hardest thing I could do to get back in the field," she recalled. "I knew nothing about the Pueblos. This was it." She studied the Pueblos in San Ildefonso, New Mexico. Result of this was *Maria, the Potter*. She found the tribe to be introverts, an agricultural people and intensely conservative—almost the direct opposite of the Plains Indians.

"Not only did I have to adjust my culture to theirs, but the idea I had of what an Indian culture should be like had to change also," she says. "Here was all the difference between the open and wide plains of Oklahoma and the walled villages of New Mexico."

Material for Miss Marriott's books comes from field experiences and library material.

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The material itself often suggests the form, whether an adult book or a juvenile non-fiction. She likes to do one juvenile for every adult book. She keeps a running list on file cards of ideas of subjects that interest her.

From a single project several books may emerge. During the last two summers of her O.U. enrolment, Miss Marriott was the holder of a scholarship from the anthropology department for independent research. The research, which extended well into each winter, was with the Kiowas of western Oklahoma. From these two years came material for *The Ten Grandmothers*, *Winter Telling Stories*, *Indians on Horseback*, *Blackstone Knife* and *Greener Fields*.

Her latest research project, recently completed, was begun in August 1958 for the Osage Nation. The Osages have a suit before the United States Claims Commission concerning lands ceded in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase. Her job was to determine which Indians were where between 1700 and 1800. She will go with the Osage attorneys to Washington sometime after the first of the year to help plead the case.

The project took her through all the material in the Phillips Collection and the Bizzell library relating to the Purchase and to investigation of archival material here and in eastern libraries and museums. Old maps, historical documents, memories of Osages, letters of Explorer William Clark, all are incorporated in a 300-page manuscript.

"If I don't get at least four books from it, I'll be surprised," Miss Marriott commented. "The Osages were very generous in giving me permission to use all the material after the claims are settled."

The material was somewhat difficult to locate even though the exploring priest Marquette met the Osages as early as 1685. Spellings were not standardized and French, Indian and Spanish names change and intermingle.

Each author has some kind of system. Miss Marriott, in doing research in a library or in the field, collects the information on file cards. Here she uses cross indexing and a librarian's method to check information. If the field reports don't match the record information, she attempts to find the correct answer.

Going over and over the material, she practically memorizes it. Then she makes an outline of the general subjects which

she intends to cover. Then it's to the typewriter four hours a day and an anti-social attitude.

Once a manuscript is finished she puts it away—from 10 days to two weeks for a short story to two years for a book—until she has become completely disassociated from it.

She takes out the material, re-outlines it and compares outlines for balance and importance of points. She goes over the manuscript, correcting, inserting, expanding. Then back to the typewriter for a recopying which is essentially a rewriting.

The result may be a finished product or the first of many drafts. *The Ten Grandmothers*, which Miss Marriott calls her favorite, took ten years of research and revision.

Editing can amount to a virtual collaboration when working with Mary Stith of the University Press or merely an exchange of a couple of letters and a visit to the publishers of her juveniles.

Miss Marriott has final approval of all illustrations, which she feels necessary because of the nature of the job. "If they use a picture of southwestern pottery when I'm talking about Florida the whole theory is lost," she insists.

Juveniles are the hardest of all to write. Children like factual material best. They are alive, curious and interested. Miss Marriott gauges her juveniles to one of her assortment of nieces and nephews. She also has the manuscript read to a group of school children of the appropriate age by teaching friends. The children often respond with letters asking for more information or just saying they liked the book.

Miss Marriott sees the weakness of most children's literature that it is written from an adult's point of view. "Children want the facts—that won't be contradicted later on by something they learn in college," she says.

Miss Marriott's next book is *The First Comers*, set for spring publication. It is a do-it-yourself archaeology manual for the high school age. The number of amateur archaeologists is growing. Miss Marriott cited the extensive programs of both the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts.

"Since most publications are technical, written for the archaeologist, there is a need for some general information," she continued. "Amateur archaeologists can do a great deal of good but they also can do a great deal of damage." She cited the dynamiting of the Spiro Mounds as a horrible example of an amateur's enthusiasm.

The best advice Miss Marriott had to offer the amateur archaeologist is—don't dig. Locating and plotting new sites is the most important contribution the amateur can make. Simple maps made with the aid of road maps and a compass and photographs can give the archaeologist something to work on.

If the amateur must collect, surface collections are the easiest to start with. After a rain or heavy wind storm, bits of worked stone, carved bone and occasionally potsherds (bits of pottery) can be found.

Archaeologists rely on association of artifacts, Miss Marriott continued humorously. "A skull is a nice thing to have if you collect skulls. And almost anyone is glad to have an arrowhead. But the archaeologist is happiest to find the skull with the arrowhead still buried in it."

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