

OBITUARIES

EDITH BAYLES RICKETSON, 1899–1976



Edith Hill Bayles (second from right)
in France in 1921.

Mrs. Edith Bayles Ricketson, archaeologist and ethnographer, former executive secretary of the New Mexico Association of Indian Affairs and later librarian of the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University, died July 12, 1976, at New Bedford, Massachusetts.

She was born in Fajardo, Puerto Rico, the daughter of a mining engineer, Frederick P. Bayles, and Mary Hill Bayles, on December 20, 1899. She graduated from Stuart Hall in Staunton, Virginia, in 1917 and obtained the Bachelor of Arts degree *cum laude* from Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1921. That same year she was awarded a scholarship by the American-Scandinavian Foundation to spend a winter in Norway, studying Ibsen and Birnson in Christiania and attending lectures at the Royal

Frederick's University in Oslo. During the summers of 1922 and 1923 she traveled in England, France, Andorra, Italy, and Switzerland. She became interested in archaeology at this time and engaged in graduate study at the Ecole de Paleontologie Humaine and College de France in Paris. Under a scholarship with the American School of Prehistoric Studies in France, she took part in summer excavations under the direction of Henri Martin at a Neanderthal site near Villebois Lavalette.

In 1924 she served as secretary and assistant curator of what is now the Museum of Natural History in Santa Barbara, California. The following year she was secretary to Sylvanus G. Morley at the Carnegie Institution of Washington's excavations at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico. There she met the Carnegie Institution archaeologist, Oliver G. Ricketson, and they were married in 1925. Together they carried on research on the history of Chichen Itza at the British Museum.

On their return from England, the Ricketsons set up residence in Guatemala City, traveling each dry season for a number of years to the Maya ruins of Uaxactun in El Peten, Guatemala, where Dr. Ricketson was archaeologist in charge for the Carnegie Institution of Washington. Mrs. Ricketson was ceramicist for the expedition; she was the first to analyze, classify, and publish a chronology of the Uaxactun pottery, which later, amplified and refined by Robert E. Smith, became the type chronology for almost all Mesoamerican ceramic studies for many years. Mrs. Ricketson's periods Uaxactun Ia, Ib, II, and III became, in Smith's terminology, respectively, the famous names Mamom, Chicanel, Tzakol, and Tepeu. Her analysis appeared as "Part II, the Artifacts" in the 1937 Carnegie Institution report, *Uaxactun, Guatemala, Group E*.

The journey to Uaxactun in those days was long and rough. From Belize, the capital of what was then British Honduras, it was 2 days by chartered river boat up the Belize River to the head of navigation at El Cayo, then 4 days or more by muleback through the jungle to Uaxactun. Mrs. Ricketson was one of the first—probably the first—North American woman to make this trip. A. Ledyard Smith, who was a staff member of some of these earlier Uaxactun expeditions and later directed the Uaxactun project for 5 years after Oliver Ricketson's term, writes me:

Edith handled all the artifacts that came in and was in charge of the lab at camp and did a darn good job. Also she took care of the pottery and published the first report on the ceramics of Uaxactun. She showed

great devotion to her work by putting up with not only hardships in camp but also the trials incurred on the trips in and out of Uaxactun. I remember one trip when she had to struggle for five miles in mud up to her knees crossing the *bojo* of Joventud . . . She was a good sport about things and took them in her stride.

While the Ricketsons lived in Guatemala City, she had ample opportunity to observe and collect Indian textiles, for which the highland Maya were (and still are) famous. She collected for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, and for the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. She also assembled a personal collection of more than 600 items, which was purchased in 1942 by the Taylor Museum, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

In 1936 a short article by Mrs. Ricketson "Pictographs at Lake Ayarza, Guatemala," was published in *Maya Research*. It tells of her trip with 2 friends, over rugged terrain in the Department of Santa Rosa, to photograph and record ancient painted pictographs which had recently been discovered on a cliff overlooking the lake.

The Ricketsons were divorced in 1941. For 3 months in 1945–1946 Mrs. Ricketson was acting registrar of the Brooklyn Museum. She declined an offer of a permanent position there and instead engaged in volunteer work in the Department of Mediaeval Art at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, preparing exhibits of the J. Pierpont Morgan collection of Merovingian jewelry and writing for the museum's *Art Bulletin* an article, "Barbarian Jewelry of the Merovingian Period" (1947). From 1946 to 1953, Mrs. Ricketson lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she was executive secretary of the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs. She also assisted Agnes Simms in setting up exhibits of Indian crafts in the New Mexico Alliance for the Arts and the Hall of Ethnology, Museum of New Mexico.

In October 1953, Mrs. Ricketson accepted the position of librarian of the Middle American Research Institute Library (now the Latin American Library) of Tulane University in New Orleans. The library had a phenomenal growth under her leadership. She also won the friendship and admiration of faculty, students, and visiting scholars by her expert and unselfish attention to their individual interests and needs. She was as quick to help an undergraduate find sources for a term paper as to spend an afternoon with an internationally known scholar in the rare book collection. She entertained students in her French Quarter apartment and at her own expense attended many conferences and international meetings, thus adding to her experience and usefulness as librarian and keeping the Institute represented at important meetings that would not otherwise have been attended. Among these were the Seventh National Conference, U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, in Denver; the XXXIII International Congress of Americanists in Vienna; the XXXIV International Congress of Americanists in San Jose, Costa Rica; and all the annual meetings of the Association of Latin American Librarians. In 1962 she prepared a working paper for the Seventh Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials meeting at the University of Miami Library in Coral Gables, Florida. Even after her retirement, Mrs. Ricketson continued to attend the meetings abroad of the International Congress of Americanists, among whose delegates she had many old friends. She was also a member of the Society of Woman Geographers, Washington, D.C.; the Women's Travel Club of Boston; and the National Arts Club of New York City.

Mrs. Ricketson retired to Santa Fe after her resignation was reluctantly accepted at Tulane in 1962. I met Edith first in Guatemala in 1932; in 1934 I stayed for several weeks in the Ricketsons' Spanish colonial home in Guatemala City; when I was a graduate student at Harvard, I was her frequent guest at dinner parties at her home in Cambridge; and of course I saw her almost daily for over 8 years when she was at Tulane. She was a loyal, devoted, and valued friend to my wife and me, as she was to so many other who had the good fortune to be associated with her. She is survived by two daughters, Mrs. William R. Bullard, Jr., of South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, who has participated in several archaeological programs, and Mrs. Howard B. Sprague, Jr., of Prides Crossing, Massachusetts; a son, Oliver G. Ricketson III of Makawao, Maui, Hawaii; and several grandchildren.

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