

ALFRED F. WHITING, 1912-1978

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Alfred Frank Whiting was born in Burlington, Vermont, in 1912. After attending public schools, he went to the University of Vermont, located in Burlington, graduating in 1933 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He at once enrolled in the Graduate School at the University of Michigan and the following spring received an M.A. in Taxonomic Botany. That summer he was included in a University of Michigan Botanical Expedition to San Luis Potosí, Mexico, which may well have been responsible for arousing his interest in ethnobotany, the focal point of his career.

In the summer of 1935, Whiting was appointed Curator of Biology at the Museum of Northern Arizona, where he spent the first few months collecting plants and organizing the herbarium. In September he was joined by Dr. Volney H. Jones, also from Michigan, and together they began a survey of Hopi Indian crop plants for the Michigan Ethnobotanical Laboratory. When the harvest was over, Jones returned to Ann Arbor, but Whiting stayed in Flagstaff to record with Edmund Nequatewa, a Hopi man on the Museum staff, the names and uses of cultivated and wild plants he and Jones had collected on the Hopi mesas. Al, whose title at the Museum had been changed to Curator of Botany, continued to collect and work on the wild plants of Flagstaff and Hopi areas and the Hopi crops until the fall of 1937. At that time he enrolled in the University of Chicago to begin work on a Ph.D. in the combined fields of botany and anthropology.

Whiting returned to Flagstaff in the summer of 1938 and completed his manuscript on the *Ethnobotany of the Hopi* published as Bulletin 15 of the Museum of Northern Arizona in 1939. The school years of 1938-39 and 1939-40 were spent in Chicago working on his Ph.D. Here he married Dorothy J. West, whom he had met at International House at the University, where they both lived. In September 1940, they came to Flagstaff for the next 2 years while Al completed fieldwork among the Havasupai in preparation for his dissertation on their ethnobiology. He also continued to serve as Curator of Botany at the Museum.

In the late summer of 1941, Al was given an unexpected opportunity, unusual for that day and age, to be anthropological advisor to an educational film company, Coronet Productions of Chicago, which was about to produce color sound films of the Hopi, Navajo, Havasupai and Apache Indians. He assisted in arrangements with the tribes for Coronet to make the films and accompanied the photographers to the various reservations. This brought him in contact with the Indian people, their tribal governments, and Bureau of Indian Affairs personnel, altogether an enriching experience.

The Coronet films completed, Whiting undertook a 6 month project, sponsored by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the U.S. Department of Interior and the Museum of Northern Arizona, to make an intensive survey of production and marketing problems of Hopi Indian arts and crafts. Although the films and the crafts survey were monetarily successful for the student with a wife and child, unfortunately, they diverted him from his Ph.D. dissertation, which he might have completed while still in Flagstaff. Due to World War II and other unforeseen circumstances, he never completed its writing or his degree.

In July 1942, the Whitings returned to the Midwest where Al continued his graduate work at Chicago until the fall of 1944 when he accepted an Assistant Professorship at the University of Oregon, substituting for a member of the Anthropology Faculty who was serving in the armed forces in World War II. While at Oregon, most of Whiting's time appears to have been occupied with teaching his first college classes and curatorial work at the Oregon State Museum. He published an article in *American Anthropologist*, "The Origin of Corn, an Evaluation of Fact and Theory," based in part on his M.A. thesis at Michigan.

The winter climate in Oregon did not agree with either of the Whittings or their 2 young sons and they were frequently sick. During this time Al and Dorothy separated and she and the 2 boys returned to Chicago where her parents resided; a divorce soon followed. Al wrote to a friend that he longed to get back to the dry Southwest, and so, in the spring of 1947 when his teaching term was up, he moved to Tucson and Tumacacori in the southern Arizona desert to spend the next several years.

At the University of Arizona, in association with the Arizona State Museum where he found many old friends, Whiting settled down to do what he most enjoyed in life: research. Based on the results of some historical studies, he wrote "A Kino Triptych" and "The Tumacacori Census of 1796," the latter published in *The Kiva* of the Arizona Archaeological Society. The cover of this issue of *The Kiva* was illustrated with a water color painting by Whiting (reproduced in black and white) of a reconstruction of the mission church of Tumacacori. During his years in Tucson he painted a number of watercolors of other missions and scenes in the area. A stay at Tumacacori inspired 2 delightful stories based on personal experience with some Spanish-Americans of that vicinity, "The Happy Cemetery" and "Miracle in the Living Room." A trip to visit the Seri Indians, on the west coast of Sonora and Tiburon Island, to collect and study the plants they used, resulted in his reviewing all recorded data on that tribe. Anticipating a future publication on his Seri work, he collected several loose leaf binders of data. In 1950-51, apparently feeling the need of some income, he took a position as a master in the Santa Cruz Valley School.

In the summer of 1951, Al was a member of the Cornell University Cultural Seminar, initiated by Dr. Alexander H. Leighton, which was well described by Bunker and Adair in their book, *The First Look at Strangers*. His friends, John Adair of Cornell University and Edward H. Spicer of the University of Arizona, were field directors of the 5 week summer course, then in its third year. Adair and Spicer may have enlisted Whiting to introduce the international group of students to the Hopis, among whom he had worked many times. The students spent a week each among the Papagos, Navajos and Hopis of Arizona and the Rio Grande Pueblos and Spanish Americans of Truchas, New Mexico. This was an unusual and especially stimulating opportunity for Al to meet students from distant lands, and to observe the imaginative and skillful techniques employed by Adair and Spicer in introducing them to the peoples of the Southwest. In learning how to communicate with American Indians with whose language and culture they were unfamiliar, the students of the Seminar were preparing themselves to exchange ideas and information with native peoples anywhere.

Participation in the Cornell Cross-Cultural Seminar seems to have marked a turning point in Whiting's career, for by then he had given up the thought of returning to Chicago to complete his Ph.D. Early in 1952 he applied for and received a 2 year appointment as District Anthropologist for Ponape, Eastern Carolines, U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. While he was in Washington, D.C. being interviewed for this position, he renewed his acquaintance with Marjorie Grant, a nutritionist in the U.S. Public Health Service, who had been a member of the Cross-Cultural Seminar the previous summer. Within a few weeks they were married, and soon left for the South Pacific.

As far as we know Whiting did not publish anything about his work on Ponape, where he was the third anthropologist for the district after World War II. A general description of the duties and headaches of such an anthropologist is to be found in a recent publication by J.L. Fischer (1979). A brief statement indicates that Whiting, as well as others, was often at odds with the policies of the district administrator.

In spite of whatever problems he may have had, Whiting was intensely interested in every aspect of his work with the native people of the island, as attested by his collection of field notes, papers, photographs and correspondence which he presented in 1975 to the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution, where they occupy 7 linear feet of shelf space. Included are diaries recording daily events, correspondence and official reports, answers to questions of persons in the government of the Trust Territory, and summaries of economic conditions of the islands; a card file of notes arranged by subject covering

everything from history through material culture, social and legal problems to census data; archaeology, maps, linguistics, negatives and prints; and a collection of books on Micronesia in Japanese. A Ponapean language newsletter was begun by Whiting while on the island, and several copies are in the collection.

When their tour of duty on Ponape was completed, Al and Marjorie decided to go to Guam for a year, Al to teach and Marjorie to make a survey for the U.S. Public Health Service. Leaving Marjorie on Guam, Al returned to the States, visiting Saipan and Japan en route. He planned a brief visit in Vermont with his mother and then to return to the South Pacific. However, he found that his former wife was hospitalized and he went to Denver to look after their 2 young sons. He decided it would not be possible to return to Guam that year, and so he and his sons went East and he sought a teaching position, which he found in the High School at Rockport, Massachusetts. Marjorie returned in August, and they rented a large old farmhouse near the school and close enough to Boston for Marjorie to work on her Ph.D. The following July and August, Al was at the Children's Museum of Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he conducted the Wonder Workshop. About that time he received word that he had been appointed Curator of Anthropology at Dartmouth College Museum. Whiting had at last found a position well suited to his interest and his talents, a museum where he could work with college students and where intellectual curiosity was highly regarded.

When Whiting arrived at Dartmouth College Museum he found a vast quantity of material pertaining to his department in storage, and many of the specimens lacking documentation. He spent most of his time the first years in reorganizing the storage collections, researching the origins of the specimens, and preparing new exhibits. Soon he offered to guide the museum tours for beginning Sociology classes to introduce the students to physical and cultural anthropology. This led to a weekly lab course in the museum to expose students to the various sub-disciplines in anthropology and to teach museology. He enlisted students and others as volunteer curators, who not only helped in organizing and researching the museum collections, but prepared exhibits and major shows.

In 1961 Al was promoted to the rank of assistant professor but retained his title, Curator of Anthropology; 5 years later he became Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology in addition to continuing as Curator in the Museum. He taught a course each year, usually an advanced seminar, on a variety of subjects: Museum Methods, African Ethnography, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, Primitive Art (which included the development of jazz and blues in America), and Primitive Technology. He supervised students with individual projects covering cultures from the Andes to the Arctic. In all these courses each student was required to prepare an exhibit case, selecting the material, preparing the case and labels, to final polishing of the glass. Whiting never seemed too busy to discuss problems and offer assistance or advice to his students, whether on the preparation of an exhibit or a personal matter. His enthusiasm for the work at hand, innovative methods and imaginative techniques of teaching, combined with his kindly manner and his wit, endeared him to students and colleagues.

During his years in Hanover, Whiting published a number of book reviews, articles on museology, and articles on Hopi life. Occasionally, he returned to the Southwest to spend a summer or a brief vacation to renew old friendships. He and several students made a survey of material culture in the pueblos of Taos and Tesuque for the Museum of New Mexico, purchasing specimens and recording copious notes. Sometimes one or both of his sons accompanied him, but not his wife for they had separated soon after he went to Dartmouth.

When the summer of 1974 arrived Al was ready to retire after 19 very demanding years, and left Dartmouth for Arizona. He spent several months in Flagstaff where he renewed his association with the Museum of Northern Arizona where he was appointed Research Ethnobotanist. He purchased a small house with one acre of land at Cornville, in the Verde Valley, Arizona, where the winters are mild and the summers hot. He especially wished to escape the Flagstaff winters, feeling that he had had enough cold and snow in New England.

He commuted to Flagstaff and the Museum once a week to work on a revision of *Ethnobotany of the Hopi*, the third printing having been sold out. During the summers of 1975-1977, he grew experimental plots of corn, beans, squash, and devil's claw, with seeds he obtained from the Hopi, Havasupai, Apache, and Papago Indians of Arizona. He was studying the genetics of these various Indian crops to determine their relationships.

From Dartmouth, Al brought with him about 12 linear feet of looseleaf notebooks filled to capacity with notes and photographs containing the results of a considerable part of his research for the previous 45 years. He hoped to prepare for publication, during the pleasant Cornville winters, the numerous manuscripts he had accumulated. All his hopes and plans suddenly came to an end when he was taken ill in the late fall of 1977 and died a few months later.

The publications of Whiting that appear in his bibliography represent only a small fraction of his interests. Before his death he arranged to leave his notebooks to Dr. P. David Seaman of Northern Arizona University, with the hope that he could have them published in the future.

Al Whiting had a brilliant, active and creative mind, always far ahead of his manual dexterity. When some exhaustive investigation was written to *his* satisfaction, his agile mind leaped ahead to the next project. He simply could not endure the tedium of writing and rewriting a text to suit an editor and so most of his major research has never appeared in print. His manuscript on the ethnobiology of the Havasupai Indians has been inspected by a number of editors but all have given up in despair upon viewing the "completed" work. Al was constantly being lured away from one interesting project to another, although he was very thorough in conducting his studies and collected vast amounts of extremely valuable information which he planned to publish. Other notes were used for teaching and as the basis for museum exhibits. He had a fertile imagination, which combined with a delightful sense of humor and a talent for words, led him to publish some charming articles and stories and contributed greatly to his success as a professor and museum curator. He also wrote many scientific papers on a variety of subjects.

The anthropological profession lost a brilliant and versatile colleague when Alfred F. Whiting died. It is fitting that the Second Annual Conference on Ethnobiology was dedicated to him as well as to his former associate at the Museum of Northern Arizona, Lyndon L. Hargrave.

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