

Elizabeth Augustus Whitehead 1928-1983 by Doreen Spitzer¹

Elizabeth Grace Augustus was born in Willoughby, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, on June 17, 1928. With her older brother, Albert, an older sister, Daneen, and a younger sister Margaret, they were the children of Ellsworth Hunt and Elizabeth Good Augustus. Her father was a civic-minded industrialist and philanthropist. Her mother raised thoroughbred horses for show on their Ohio farm. The family travelled widely, and the children had a broad liberal education and no lack of cultural advantages. Daneen said that their mother's motto was: "Never let school interfere with your childrens' education."

Growing up in a well-to-do, caring, and comfortable family, Betsy attended Hathaway Brown School and went on to Sarah Lawrence College where she graduated with the class of 1950. A quiet, popular and outstanding student, she continued as Class President after graduation, alternating with her close friend, Gladys Chang (Hardy), as President-for-Life of her class.

The depth and variety of her academic "groundwork" is evident in the intelligence and the broad range of interests in people and in history which remained her hall-marks through life. Sarah Lawrence College, however, had no course in archaeology *per se*. The closest thing offered was anthropology, and there is no record of Betsy having courses in that department.

In 1952 she married Curtis Jones, scion of a New York family. Her father-in-law had founded "Jones New York" the apparel shop for women. The young couple settled on a farm near Lahaska in Buck's Country, Pennsylvania, where Curtis was renovating a large fieldstone house.

But where, when, and how did her commitment to archaeology begin? Her brother reports that Betsy was 33 and the mother of three small children when their enterprising parents organized a family tour to Greece. Her father, now retired, had become National President of the Boy Scouts of America. On this trip he was to attend the annual Scout Jamboree at Marathon with his Greek counterpart, and together the family would see something of the country. They were accompanied throughout the trip by a Greek guide, Constantine Nicoloudis, whose inexhaustible and articulate knowledge of his country's history, mythology, topography, and antiquities had earned him degrees from Oxford.

Mr. Nicoloudis kept a diary of the entire trip, which was taken in part by yacht. A few excerpts from this account will illustrate the adventures the party had. As the ship departs from Piraeus, he pointed out the impressive 5th century B.C. fortification walls, built by order of Themistocles, just visible below the Royal Yacht Club. He described the famous battle of Salamis where the Athenian triremes were completely annihilating Xerxes' fleet, to the surprise and dismay of the Persian king, watching from the shore. The party anchored off Cape Sounion. The next day they were introduced to Pausanias, the intrepid 2nd century A.D. Baedeker, whose ten-volume description of Greece, he tells them, began right there in Sounion. When the party reached Mycenae, Constantine begged them to read the myths and the plays. He brought in the Atreidae, Agamemnon and Clytemnaestra, the Trojan war and the implacability of the gods.. He walked his students through the Lion Gate and the palace, making comprehensible in three dimensions what seems at first only a bewildering jumble of stones.

This amazing trip continued as it had begun, at every site "it all comes alive," the

ancient mingling seamlessly with the modern. What Constantine gave this family was nothing less than a first-rate illustrated course in classical archaeology. This was Betsy's initial exposure to Greece and the ancient world.

Returning home in September, she applied for admission to the Department of Classical Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania, within easy reach of her home in Buck's County. G. Roger Edwards, then Associate Curator of the Mediterranean Section, remembers her eagerness at their interview. Betsy began commuting to the university in 1963. She took Rodney Young's course on the Iron Age in Geometric Greece and Greek Pottery with Roger Edwards as well as his Hellenistic Architecture. James Pritchard remembered her as a serious and dedicated student in his seminar on Ancient Archaeology of the Near East. During this time, George Bass of Texas A and M University, a pioneer in underwater archaeology, was giving seminars at Pennsylvania on Neolithic, Early and Middle Bronze Age and Seafaring in Antiquity, both of which Betsy attended. He recalls her as "a first rate student." Although she discovered that she was not keen on scuba-diving, she greatly admired Bass and in 1968 became a founder and generous supporter of his American Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

Through these contacts at the university, Betsy gained first-hand experience of actual excavation. Rodney Young was directing the University Museum's excavation at Gordion, capital city of famed King Midas of Lydia in Asia Minor, and Betsy was invited to join the 1965 season, which began in a very chilly April. It has been observed that "working in an excavation can be a very revealing test of personality." The dig at Gordion was not known for luxurious living: "a bucket of water each week for bathing, and one's jeans were not always immaculate." The almost-legendary Rodney, however, maintained a commendable degree of social etiquette. Cocktails were served every evening, and a colleague remembers Betsy, with glass in hand, sitting on an overturned bucket but elegantly attired in an embroidered cashmere sweater. Wherever she might be, Betsy always set a tone of elegance and gracious living. Every day of her three week season, however, she was also out on the mound, supervising the digging, filling her excavation notebook with careful details and beautiful drawings.

In 1967, another University Museum expedition, this one in search of ancient Thurii, took Betsy to Torre el Mordillo, near Sybaris on the instep of Italy. Other members of this team were Dorothy Hill, the Oliver Colburns, Phyllis Pollak (now Katz) of Archaeology magazine, and G. Roger Edwards, director and author of the article in *Expedition* for which Betsy took the photographs, although the credit line does not appear.² Phyllis and Roger report that Betsy "worked hard supervising her trench, again keeping careful notes, was enormously energetic and helpful and looked quite professional in her Abercrombie and Fitch suit, clipboard in hand!" Oliver Colburn, who was also at Gordion described this excavation with a footnote on E.A.W.³

It was not only at the University of Pennsylvania that Betsy sought Greek studies. Bryn Mawr's department of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology beckoned enticingly. In 1966 she was one of "a good bunch who contributed really spirited discussions" in Machteld Mellink's seminar on Miinoan Archaeology. The next year it was Problems in Greek Sculpture with Brunhilda. Ridgway. Betsy reported for the seminar on a controversial limestone head in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts--was it

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Greek, Archaic, or Cypriot? Professor Ridgway's comment: "a serious, interested student, competent, probably good."

The next year, Dorothy Burr Thompson, living in Princeton, was also commuting to Penn and teaching in the Classical Archaeology department. Among her students, Dorothy discovered Betsy, and Betsy was delighted to offer Dorothy transportation for the 50-mile trip three times a week. In that year they became fast friends. Thus in the course of the years 1963-69, Betsy Jones was exposed to some of the finest teachers in the field. She appeared to be deeply committed to the discipline. In five years, she had completed the course requirements for the Ph.D. in Classical Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania. There remained only the dissertation to write, but there she stopped. Why?

Was she, at age 40, having second thoughts about her future? Was she asking herself if she really wanted an academic career? She hardly needed to teach for a living. "Women's Lib" was not yet a compelling popular movement, and I doubt that Betsy would have been drawn into it. She was thoroughly enjoying her studies; the lectures, the academic concentration, meeting the scholars in her classes--Keith de Vries and Michael Katzev among them. Thanks to the latter, Betsy's nephew, Dan Hitchcock, worked for several seasons in 1968-69 with Katzev in Cyprus on the Kyrenia. Betsy was absorbed in this stimulating scholarly atmosphere. At the same time, however, there were also the very practical realities of a family with three young children and involvement with their sports, dances, parties, lessons, transportation, arguments, decisions. Also by 1968, with the complications and trauma of a divorce, her personal life was in uneasy turmoil, which understandably reduced both time and motivation for scholarly pursuits. Under these extremely trying circumstances, a major change of direction now in her life does not seem surprising.

The winter of 1968-69 found Betsy on the ski slopes of Vail, Colorado with her children Evan 12, Sydney 14 and Dylan 15. As she was standing in line for the chair lift, she met one Jack Whitehead, with his daughter Susan in the same line. There followed a whirlwind courtship, as the saying goes, and she married Edwin C. Whitehead on August 1, 1969. Did this marriage provide the final and most cogent reason for her to abandon the Ph.D.? Whatever the reason, the timing, the impulse, that decision was crucial to her subsequent career.

It is not hard to understand why she married Jack Whitehead. He was a self-made, energetic, hard-hitting, imaginative, shrewd businessman, not an academic, but an industrialist, a philanthropist, "a rough diamond with a red rose in his lapel." Whitehead was a major supporter of medical research. He had attended schools in New York and briefly the University of Virginia. In 1939, he and his father had borrowed \$5000. to launch Technicon Corporation in a one room office in the Bronx.⁴ From this modest beginning, Jack had become a pioneer maker of automated clinical laboratory testing equipment. He had earned his fortune through advances in medicine, and he wanted to pay back. He succeeded in creating a world-class biomedical research organization, the Whitehead Institute, which has been associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology since 1984.

Jack worked hard and he played hard: squash, tennis, skiing. He and Betsy were

very different individuals, yet their values and their appetites for action, accomplishment, quality of life were in tune. He chided Betsy for being self-effacing. It was true, as he himself said, he had enough ego for both of them! He wanted her with him to travel, play tennis, ski, work together on his “dream” of the Institute. Jack had five children, three from one previous wife, two from another. Their combined manage for a time included all eight. Both Jack and Betsy had health problems which were to complicate their lives.

In January 1971, Rodney Young, President of the Archaeological Institute of America, who had known Betsy at Penn and at Gordion, appointed her General Secretary of the Institute. This was the position which Jane Sammis Ord, who was moving to California, and before her, Claireve Grandjouan (q.v.) had made indispensable to the administration of the A.I.A. Was the appointment a surprise to her? The position did not require a degree, but it promised to put her accumulated knowledge, and her characteristic instinct for being helpful, to the service of this important archaeological organization. It might even provide a relief from domestic concerns.

Her subsequent seven years with the A.I.A. spanned a difficult time in its history. Archaeology was becoming ever more popular and membership in the Institute was growing. There were more tours, lectures, committees, projects as well as more subscribers, authors and new material for the *American Journal* of Archaeology and for the magazine, *Archaeology*. To accommodate effectively the expansion of responsibilities which accompanied this surge of vitality, some reorganization of the central office had to be undertaken. Changes, however, are always unsettling.

The office was then in New York at 260 Broad Street, later 55 Park Place, a half-hour commute from the Whitehead's home in Greenwich, Connecticut. At Betsy's request, this position was voluntary and for a nominal three days a week only, so as to leave time for family and friends and a large household. To be sure, the three days sometimes deliberately stretched to include a weekend, for getting the files in order or for doing, as she said, “whatever needs to be done. The more you do, the more you can do,” was Betsy's mantra. Conversely, she could be away for a couple of weeks, skiing in Colorado, traveling with Jack and the children. In 1974 he chartered a yacht and the combined family cruised the waters of Corsica, Sardinia, the Pontine Islands and explored Pompeii and Herculaneum. In the little harbor of Ventetento on the Yugoslav coast, they came upon berths carved out of bedrock for a fleet of ancient Roman galleys. Here was archaeology to delight Betsy!

Back in the General Secretary's office, the amount of letters, proposals, reports and phone conversations she handled with thoughtful concentration is prodigious to contemplate. Betsy was truly dedicated and worked with “seemingly limitless energy.” She visited a number of the eighty or so local societies and got to know their presidents and secretaries. Her personal warmth, genuine concern for their programs, and enthusiastic support were contagious. She was particularly effective in her efforts to enlarge the membership. Regular meetings of the American Council of Learned Societies and of the Council's secretaries gave her useful information on people and procedures. The contacts she herself produced, however, through the monthly *Newsletter*, which she edited, the annual *Bulletin of Fieldwork Opportunities*, which she researched and wrote, were crucial to the liaison between the central office and local societies. The

backbone of the A.I.A. was the lecture program, and this had been masterfully organized by Eileen Markson until 1973, when she became head librarian of the Department of Greek and Near Eastern Archaeology at Bryn Mawr. One A.I.A. lecturer returned from a regional tour greatly impressed by what a tremendous resource for responsible archaeology the local societies are because they involve “people”--both lay and professional--not just the “best” scholars or excavators. These people “attract and educate their own members, who in turn influence the general public’s understanding of archaeology, and the end result is good public relations for the A.I.A.”

Several major contributions Betsy Whitehead made to the A.I.A. were through two committees, each of which broadened the reach of the Institute beyond the limits of the classical world. The Committee on American Archaeology, specified in the original A.I.A. charter, had founded the School of American Research in Santa Fe and then turned into its Managing Committee. Betsy proposed to restore the Committee on American Archaeology to include both prehistoric and historic archaeology of the New World: Canada, North, Central and South America. Not a trivial undertaking! With the approval of the Executive Committee, she compiled a list of Americanists who had shown interest in the A.I.A. (among them Gordon Wiley, an A.I.A. Gold Medalist although not a member) circulated a questionnaire to this roster, persuaded the seven most enthusiastic responders to serve an initial term on the Committee, suggested lectures, functions and programs. Typically thorough, she arranged meetings, contacted the appropriate government departments of countries involved, initiated connections with related organizations. By October, 1975, the Committee on American Archaeology, with its regional satellite sub-committees, and with the blessing of Fred Matson, then President of the A.I.A., was off and running. Interestingly enough, it was early in the era of concern for the environment that one of the related organizations the Committee made contact with was the National Park Service, officially commending the N.P.S. for its integrity in protecting the archaeological lands and artifacts as well as the environment under its jurisdiction. The N.P.S. was further pleased by the A.I.A. resolution concerning the storing and curating of specimens.

In April, 1975, the National Science Foundation’s Committee on Scholarly Relations with the People’s Republic of China asked if the A.I.A. wished to make a proposal for visits, joint workshops, and other forms of collaboration and intellectual exchange. The A.I.A. had already proposed a tour to China, but permission did not come through. Betsy even located translators with proper credentials, to be ready in case the proposals did go through. In November, 1975, however, she made a visit to China with an educational delegation from Duke University. Her husband was well informed about Duke; he had been looking into several academic institutions to decide the future location and academic association of the medical institute he was creating. Betsy’s clear, modest report of this trip appears in *Archaeology*, her only published article as far as I know, along with the photo of her with Professor Change, Director of the Institute of Archaeology in Beijing.⁵

Shortly after her return from a second visit to China in 1976, this time with Jack, she was invited to join the Board of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations and discussed with them the idea of creating an A.I.A. Committee on East Asian

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Archaeology, which could encourage the Chinese to come to the U.S. for exchange visits of students and museum personnel of both countries.

In the A.I.A. office, Betsy had a staff of eleven, and in each of her Annual Reports she gives full credit and appreciation to each of them. In the interests of greater efficiency, from time to time an Executive Director was added to the staff; the two offices co-existed uneasily for several years. But the confusion as to which official had which responsibilities made this arrangement unwieldy, inefficient, and uncomfortable. Betsy retired from the A.I.A. in 1978 in order to devote more time to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens for which she had become a trustee in 1972 and President of the Board in 1976.

It was then that the position of Executive Director and General Secretary were merged into the position of Administrative Assistant to the President of the A.I.A. Thus Betsy Whitehead was the last A.I.A. General Secretary, having served under four presidents: Rodney Young, Fred Matson, James Pritchard, and Robert Dyson, two of whom had been her professors. The Board commended her devoted service, her "thoughtful concern for the well-being of the Institute, extending to all its activities with beneficial results, not the least of which was to confirm the role of the A.I.A. as central to all archaeological enterprise in the U.S. and Canada." She was one of the very few to be named "Honorary Fellow of the A.I.A. for Life."

Betsy Whitehead, of course, had other interests in addition to her family and the A.I.A. She served as a trustee of Sarah Lawrence College from 1976 to 1980; as a member of the Society of Professional Archaeologists, of the Association for Field Archaeology, board member of the American Institute of Nautical Archaeology, and she routinely attended board meetings of the Whitehead Institute. One affiliation she especially enjoyed was membership on the executive board of the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, from 1972 until 1980. "I learned so much from the brilliant discourse of these scientists and scholars," she said. The Board praised the significant contributions she made to their meetings as well as her generous financial support of that institution.

It was Robert A. McCabe, trustee of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens since 1969, who had met Betsy at A.I.A. board meetings and proposed her for the School's Board. She became the second woman to join the Board, the first lady trustee having been Mrs. J. Montgomery Sears, elected in 1924. This institution had been playing a major role in the U.S. and Canada in the training of classical scholars; its reputation for excellence was amply confirmed by its track record. She was aware that the School, like most academic institutions, was in urgent need of "an infusion of new money." It must cope with rising inflation in both countries, expand the Blegen library, increase endowment, augment salaries and stipends for the service, administration, and teaching staff as well as fund publications, underwrite training programs and maintain buildings and grounds. Having been first elected to the Board in 1971, she succeeded William Kelly Simpson in 1976 as its president, the first woman in the history of the School to hold this position.

One of her concerns was the maintaining of cordial relations and mutual respect between the Greek Archaeological Service and persons or institutions representing the

School. An imbalance or misunderstanding in these relations could jeopardize the success of the School's mission, as could also becoming involved in Greek politics.

In June of 1979, Betsy went to Athens and spent four days getting acquainted with the School, and sent a report to the Trustees. She took a leading role in organizing the Centennial Campaign and set the pace with her generous personal contribution. During her tenure, the capital endowment drive was going on, the income to be used for the Gennadius Library, for salaries, to restore the Professor of Archaeology, the operate the Agora as study center and grants came in from an impressive variety of foundations: such as the Culpeper, the Demos, the Mellon. The fund raising effort exceeded its goal. With a view to giving the School broader public exposure, in 1979 Betsy engaged a public relations firm to create a slide show with running commentary to illustrate what the School 's purpose and activities encompass. Her most enduring contribution to the School may be the semi-annual *Newsletter*, which she started, with Jack's help, at the beginning of her tenure in 1977. The *Newsletter* not only let its readers know what was happening in the School, but it swiftly became, and remains, a splendid means of illustrating the School, recording scholarly research excavations, publications, and personnel changes. It made the School and its mission better known to foundations, institutions, and a more general audience, thereby increasing public support. It will be an invaluable source for the author of the third 50-year history of the School. Editing the Spring 1983 number was one of the last things she did before going to the hospital. "You are what you do," she said.

In the mid-1970's already, the illness which culminated in her death (pulmonary fibrosis) began to make itself felt. She had trouble breathing and was obliged to use oxygen frequently. For nearly ten years she fought it with great personal courage and determination, quietly, valiantly. One would not suspect what difficulties she had; in public she appeared calm and self-possessed, even skiing with an oxygen tank strapped to her back! From 1976 until her death, she gave herself to the service of the School, as one of the most vital agencies for increasing and spreading knowledge of Classical Civilization, and as one of the most effective links between the people of modern Greece and the people of this continent.

"She was ready at a moment's notice to plot ways and means to cope with problems stemming from increasing demands on limited funds," recalled Mabel Lang. "Working with her was not only a pleasure, it was a liberal education in 'how to win friends and influence people.' She personally went to Washington to urge the NEH to reconsider their decision not to fund the Agora excavation, to no avail. She did have the satisfaction of seeing the Centennial Campaign, with its \$6 million goal, well past the half-way point before she became critically ill.

Betsy's behind-the-scenes work for the School was in concert with trustees, committees, professional academics, scholars, the public. Never for personal honor. Homer Thompson put it this way: "Betsy was wise in the ways of the world, skillful at finding organizations and individuals who combined concern for and knowledge of cultural affairs with also some financial resources. It is rare for the governance of an institution to be served with such tireless energy, warm-hearted devotion, and modest self-effacement."

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Some events which occurred after her death in 1983 remain to be reported. Fortunately, the following year Jack Whitehead accepted the Trustees' invitation to become a trustee of the School in his own right. The Memorial Fund, generated right after Betsy's death, had already grown to a considerable amount when Jack, upon learning how vital the positions of Visiting Professor were to the School's program, straightway doubled the "Betsy Fund." This splendid gesture made it possible for the School to endow two "Elizabeth A. Whitehead Visiting Professorships." Until his death at age 72 in 1991, Jack Whitehead continued his active interest in and support of the School.

Betsy had left to the School a large portion of her own library: nearly a thousand books on the history, religion and archaeology of numerous countries. Many volumes have filled gaps in the Blegen library in Athens and in the library of the American School's office in Princeton.

Her portrait by the Argentine artist Raymond de Luca was copied to be hung in the dining room of Loring Hall at the School in Athens. The inscription, noting her service to the School, adds the quotation from Sophocles' *Antigone*: "We should look not to length of time but to deeds." The portrait, in best Greek tradition, reveals the ideal--beauty, dedication and intelligence, which were Elizabeth Augustus Whitehead's in abundance.

Notes:

1. It was not until I became a trustee of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in 1977 that I met Betsy Whitehead, who had been elected President of the Board the year before. Faced, nearly 20 years later, with the invitation to write a biographical article of her, I realized that I had no knowledge of how she got started on her exceptionally dedicated career as a promoter and supporter of archaeology. What was it that first ignited the obvious enthusiasm for Classical Antiquity which became a major focus of her life? The search into her earlier history has brought me into fascinating contact, as the story unfolds, with many persons, living and dead, to whom I am beholden for the information they shared with me; they have made it possible to put together at least some of the pieces of her remarkable life.
2. *Expedition 2*, No. 1, (Winter 1966).
3. *Notizie degli Scavi*, 31 (1977).
4. Technicon was developed from the invention by a pathologist named Leonard Skegg of a machine called an autoanalyzer. It was the first of its kind for carrying out accurately and rapidly an automatic analysis of blood.
5. *Archaeology*, 29 (April, 1976), 130-31.

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Sources:

Files of the years 1978-83, stored in the office of the American School at Mayer House at 41 East 72nd Street in New York City, were destroyed when the basement was flooded in 1986. I am therefore enormously grateful for the personal recollections, files, photos, information and referrals from many persons who worked with, are related to, or have remembrance of Elizabeth Augustus Whitehead. These are:

Family: son Evan Jones, daughter Sydney Jones, first husband Curtis Jones, sister Daneen A. Hitchcock, brother Albert Augustus, nephew Dan Hitchcock, husband Jack Whitehead, step daughter Susan Whitehead.

Mentors, Colleagues, Teachers: Rodney Young, G. Roger Edwards, Ellen Kohler, George Bass, James Pritchard, Fred Matson, Machteld Mellink, Bruni Ridgway, Mabel Lang, Dorothy Thompson, Keith DeVries, Kenneth Sams, Michael Katzev, Don White, Faith Henclewood Webster

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Friends, co-workers, printed sources. Gladys Chang Hardy, Phyllis Katz, Jane Ord, Phoebe Sheftel, Charlotte Moore, Jane Sibley, Elizabeth Chandler (Archives Hathaway Brown School), Patricia Owen (Archives, Sarah Lawrence College), *AIA Bulletins*, staff members; ASCSA Annual Reports 1979-1982; *ASCSA Newsletters*: H.A. Thompson and Gladys Chang Hardy, "Eulogia" *ASCSA Newsletter* Winter, 1984, page 1.

Captions for photos:

Portrait of E.A.W. by Peter Cook. Courtesy of the A.S.C.S.A.

E.A.W. with her children ca. 1964. Courtesy of Sydney Jones.

E.A.W. at her trench with excavation notebook. Courtesy of Jane S. Ord.