Eleanor Emlen Myers, 1925-1996

by J. Wilson Myers

Ellie, as she wanted everyone she met to call her, came into archaeology by a side door and then only after a successful twenty-year career as a teacher and consultant in child development. She never claimed the formal academic title of archaeologist, all her training and experience was on the job. She adapted easily to rugged outdoors life, was fascinated by foreign cultures, made friends easily, and loved to travel. In Crete, at seventy-one, in May of 1996, she was about to start work on her twenty-second season abroad when a minor seizure gave warning of a brain tumor. Leaving Greece, and after surgery in Boston, she was able to return home for another six months to rural Tamworth, New Hampshire, but never recovered. Bedridden by a window looking out on her bird feeder, she was characteristically brave and even cheerful with visiting friends as she weakened toward a December death.

Ellie told her husband that among unfinished projects she had two regrets: that she'd been unable to send more of her aerial prints to the research archive the two had started at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens--she had only been able to pick the best negatives and leave instructions for others. She wished too that she had made more progress on the story she planned to write for her six grandchildren.

She was only sure of the start: "Your grandfather and I worked together for many years as an archaeological field team. We traveled and lived in our camping van in an adventure that took us to hundreds of half-buried ancient cities and villages, to temples and tombs, hill-top citadels, sanctuaries, and abandoned seaports. Some were in the desert, some on islands, on mountain peaks, and a few were under water. We used a tethered blimp named Daedalus, a thirty-foot white shark in the sky, to lift radio-controlled cameras high above ruins and sites and excavations. This birds-eye view showed us the exact shape and pattern of manmade structures finally uncovered after thousands of years. It was my job to trigger the cameras by remote control when I knew they were over the target, sometimes half a mile high. I'd develop the negatives the same day to be sure they were clear and sharp--not easy to do when you're camping.. I also took ground photographs of the sites, and made notes in the field, and some later in libraries, for our lectures and exhibits. The van, outfitted with beds and a kitchen, carrying tents for our helpers, got hard use. Our tours took us across the Mediterranean and into the Middle East: to Italy and Sicily, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Israel, and Jordan--but most often to Greece, and best of all, down to Crete."

She never finished the story, but to help her grandchildren picture that life better when they were older, set aside six copies of The Aerial Atlas of Ancient Crete, for which she was both co-editor and photographer. Together with the collected research archive of her

prints, this book was the capstone of her second career, a career for which much in her childhood and young adult life had already prepared her.

Born January 5th, 1925, Eleanor Cope Emlen grew up in Awbury, a forty-acre enclave of related Quaker families surrounded by city in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. Both the Copes and the Emlens had come to join the Quaker community in colonial Philadelphia, and since marriage outside the community was rare until the late 19th century, the 1850's country estate of a prosperous Quaker merchant and ship owner was gradually dotted with the homes of his descendants and their relatives. In the broad lawns and fields of the Awbury Arboretum, part now given to the city as park, Ellie grew up in rough and tumble play with a score of cousins, a healthy life of tree-climbing, bike riding, pick-up games of football and baseball, and, in winter, snowball fights and skating on the pond. The Emlen children shared the care of a cow, pony, and chickens. A tradition of delight in outdoors nature was part of the community culture, combined also with the humanitarian concerns traditional with the Society of Friends: freedom for slaves in the early days, the welfare of prisoners, proper care for the sick and needy, and quality education for all children.

Ellie had been given the name of her civic-minded grandmother who at the turn of the century had riveted attention on the condition of the public schools in "corrupt and content" Philadelphia. Impoverished by years of graft, they were, in Mrs. Emlen's words, "shabby, dirty, and dangerous." Frustrated by fruitless trips to the Board of Education to report conditions, she exposed the scandal by causing both the Board of Health and the Fire Department to inspect the worst buildings and condemn them. The first new school to be built was named after her, but making sure the reforms stuck, she organized and led a monitoring Board of Visitors.

Following her grandmother's lead, Ellie chose a career in childhood education. She was a relaxed and resourceful teacher, her leadership nearly invisible as her enthusiastic classes took to art and construction projects, sang to her guitar or auto-harp accompaniment, and studied the world of animals and plants. During World War II, while Ellie helped at a Japanese internment camp in Utah, a visiting reporter for the Christian Science Monitor wrote: "Poster paints, paper, and plenty of friendly encouragement from their pretty blonde and brown-eyed teacher this summer brought to Japanese-American children at Topaz relocation center in the Utah desert country, the joy of free creative expression. Miss Emlen, volunteer worker for the Y.W.C.A., who supervised the boys' and girls' recreation at Topaz is a junior at at Wheelock College, Boston...."

In 1948 Ellie married J. Wilson Myers; a month later she and Wil sailed for Germany to join an American Friends Service Committee relief team in the bombed-out industrial city of Ludwigshafen. Here while helping with the winter clothing distribution and the child-feeding program, she organized a day-care program for working mothers and brought books in from Switzerland to create a children's lending library. Forty-eight years

later, in 1996, she and a dozen others were surprised by an invitation from President Roman Herzog of Germany to fly, expenses paid, to the Berlin opening of an exhibit on Quaker relief at the National Historical Museum. Before TV cameras on opening night, Herzog explained his sponsorship to the museum's crowded auditorium; he had been one of the schoolchildren saved by the daily ration of "Quaker soup and biscuits."

As a young mother in Berkeley, California, Ellie had managed the kindergarten at Walden School, where art, poetry, and music had central emphasis, and her three sons were enrolled. She was both a founding committee member and first treasurer of the John Woolman School in Grass Valley, California. Later, after getting her M.A. in child psychology and education, she worked with the Michigan Department of Social Services, inspecting day-care facilities--shades of her grandmother--and advising and encouraging Head Start centers.

If Quaker commitment to education was a powerful influence in Awbury, another preoccupation, virtually a moral imperative, was the reverence for outdoors nature and natural history. Ellie's father, Arthur Cope Emlen, a landscape architect by profession, was also president of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club (DVOC) and a member the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. He had been familiar with the Academy since his boyhood trips to visit great-uncle Edward Drinker Cope, the vertebrate paleontologist. This was the famous, irascible "Dinosaur Cope" whose rivalry with his equally short-tempered professional counterpart at Yale, Othneil C. Marsh, grew so bitter that it clouded the reputation of both, and led one day, tradition held, to a fistfight on the steps of the Academy.

The Emlen house was filled with books of natural history and exploration, with cabinets of collected bird skins, mounted butterflies, pressed plants, minerals, bird etchings, paintings, and Audubon prints. Ellie, her two sisters and brother were all amateur naturalists, returning from family outings and camping trips with specimens of every sort. The whole family went regularly to public lectures at the Academy and naturalists were often invited to the Emlens' Sunday dinner.

Birds were Ellie's passionate interest. Often, at sunrise, before the family was awake, she would walk quietly through Awbury with binoculars to watch and listen as the birds began to stir. In eighth grade, her spotting of a rare subspecies of warbler was reported in the local newspaper. Soon she went on DVOC field trips with her father and her favorite among his friends, ornithologist Witmer Stone, President of the Academy. The Delaware Valley Ornithological Club had been an all-male bastion until an exception was made for Ellie's enthusiasm. She learned to identify birds by their calls, color and shape, by their behavior, habitat and patterns of flight. Always a close observer of her surroundings, she had unusually keen eyesight, great help later for spotting scattered shards and studying freshly developed aerial negatives, but in her travels in Italy, Greece, and the Middle East, she would continue to keep binoculars handy, regularly updating her

bird list.

The introduction to archaeology for both Ellie and her husband, now a professor of humanities at Michigan State University, came in 1973 on a fourteen-month sabbatical camping trip by van with their three boys through Europe and North Africa. Their project was to visit sites, monuments, and museums to make humanities course slides. Already an experienced photographer, Ellie was fully involved but also added landscapes and studies of people, especially children, to her own portfolio. In Greece at the start of the second summer they visited family friend, Wil's former Greek professor, Michael Jameson, at his underwater excavation of the drowned temple of Apollo at ancient Halieis, modern Porto Cheli. They planned to stay for a week, helping to prepare the dig house and equipment for coming students and specialists, but soon were invited to join the staff for the remaining two months. Ellie helped wherever she was needed and learned Greek as she did daily shopping for the excavation at local markets, the three boys were enlisted as divers, while Wil, whose pre-humanities transcript had included courses in electrical and mechanical engineering, kept the boats, vehicles, and equipment working.

Birds were Ellie's passionate interest. Often, at sunrise, before the family was awake, she would walk quietly through Awbury with binoculars to watch and listen as the birds began to stir. In eighth grade, her spotting of a rare subspecies of warbler was reported in the local newspaper. Soon she went on DVOC field trips with her father and her favorite among his friends, ornithologist Witmer Stone, President of the Academy. The Delaware Valley Ornithological Club had been an all-male bastion until an exception was made for Ellie's enthusiasm. She learned to identify birds by their calls, color and shape, by their behavior, habitat and patterns of flight. Always a close observer of her surroundings, she had unusually keen eyesight, great help later for spotting scattered shards and studying freshly developed aerial negatives, but in her travels in Italy, Greece, and the Middle East, she would continue to keep binoculars handy, regularly updating her bird list.

The introduction to archaeology for both Ellie and her husband, now a professor of humanities at Michigan State University, came in 1973 on a fourteen-month sabbatical camping trip by van with their three boys through Europe and North Africa. Their project was to visit sites, monuments, and museums to make humanities course slides. Already an experienced photographer, Ellie was fully involved but also added landscapes and studies of people, especially children, to her own portfolio. In Greece at the start of the second summer they visited family friend, Wil's former Greek professor, Michael Jameson, at his underwater excavation of the drowned temple of Apollo at ancient Halieis, modern Porto Cheli. They planned to stay for a week, helping to prepare the dig house and equipment for coming students and specialists, but soon were invited to join the staff for the remaining two months. Ellie helped wherever she was needed and learned Greek as she did daily shopping for the excavation at local markets, the three boys were enlisted as divers, while Wil, whose pre-humanities transcript had included courses in

electrical and mechanical engineering, kept the boats, vehicles, and equipment working.

After much planning and persuasion, they formed a program for research in aerial archaeology attached to the Department of Humanities at Michigan State University, where Ellie, leaving her career in education, could become a partner in the new venture. Funding the program, the University gave full support for travel and development of specialized equipment. The Physics Department's instrument shop made precision gimbals to hold twin cameras in true vertical position to produce scalable "photo-plans" over a level site. A link from a radio-controlled Hasselblad camera crossed to a 35mm camera so the two cameras took photographs at the same instant. Thus one remote triggering made identical images in both color and black-and-white, useful because black-and-white negatives, easy to develop in the field, when sharp and well centered offered proof that the color images of the same quality could be developed later. Engineers at the Raven balloon factory in Sioux Falls, Idaho, produced an inflatable blimp that met specifications: lift sixteen pounds of cameras and tether line half a mile and still stand a bit of breeze, turning into the wind like a kite. Spherical balloons, unstable in a rising wind, had blown down and smashed cameras.

Seriously committed to field archaeology, the Myers now divided responsibilities. A computer helped Wil handle the correspondence and keep a database of the site photographs. In the field, he would calculate the proper lenses and altitudes for each site and make a map and program for the ground crew of two or three helpers to follow. Ellie, photographer and darkroom technician, took courses in exhibition mounting and custom printing: the critical dodging and burning that turned the negative into a clearly read, properly balanced print. After developing and washing prints to archival standards, Ellie filed them in acid-free envelopes. After each summer abroad, Ellie spent the fall producing the prints and sets of slides that went back to the excavators. She kept the equipment lists, ordered supplies, and booked the overseas flights. In the field she handled the inflation of the balloon and operated the cameras, logging each shot in her notebook.

It was satisfying to be able to provide excavators with images that helped them visualize their sites in a new way, illustrate their publications, and classroom lectures, but it was clear to the Myers that there would be greater value in publishing groups of images related to each other by culture and geography. While working at Minoan sites on Crete in 1976, they talked with officials of the Greek Archaeological Service about an aerial survey of the island's major sites. Excavators on Crete would be given free copies of their site photographs in return for their descriptive entries and the local archaeological museums would also have copies available for exhibition. Officials agreed to cooperate, and when the Myers took a portfolio of Ellie's mounted prints to the Washington, D.C. office of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to discuss the idea, staff members were cordial and encouraged an application for funding. Returning to their base at American School of Classical Studies in Athens, and joined by Minoan specialist

Gerald Cadogan from the British School of Archaeology next door, they worked on the proposal for what would become The Aerial Atlas of Ancient Crete. When the NEH grant to Michigan State University was approved, fieldwork began that would occupy the next five years.

As members of the Archaeological Institute of America--Ellie had been president of the Central Michigan Society—the Myers published their work in magazines and journals and, after showing slides and exhibiting Ellie's prints at a national meeting, were sent on annual lecture tours sponsored by the Archaeological Institute of America. Invited to lecture and exhibit at the University of California at Berkeley, where Wil had done his graduate work, they met James Clark, who had sponsored the reception and later invited them to dinner. Clark, as director of the University of California Press, was eager to publish the Atlas, and Ellie and Wil would return twice while the book was in press, Ellie working closely with the art director on color-balance and layout for her photographs, while Wil conferred with the text editor.

The Aerial Atlas of Ancient Crete was co-published in 1992 by the University of California at Berkeley, and Thames & Hudson, Ltd. of London. In 12 x 12 inch format, it presented 194 photographs, 45 plans and 9 maps. For each site entry there were aerial views and a corresponding drawn plan, each shedding light on the other, a detailed description of the site (its significance, relationship to the local topography and geology, and excavation history) and a comprehensive research bibliography. For the publication party in Athens at the American School of Classical Studies, Berkeley shipped seventy copies of the six-pound book for Wil, Ellie, and Gerald Cadogan to present to the forty-four contributing excavators--most of them in town that week for a conference on Crete--and all the project helpers and cooperating officials. Thames & Hudson's gift supplied enough food and drink to sustain an all-night celebration, a symposium in the root meaning of the word.

As the Myers' file of photographed sites grew through the years, it was Ellie's idea that they apply again to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a special access grant that would provide two reference archives of her aerial prints, one for the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, another for the Center for Remote Sensing at Boston University. Retired from Michigan State University, Wil was now research professor of archaeology at Boston University, and Ellie a research fellow. The NEH grant enabled Ellie to make large prints, mount them on acid free six-ply boards and cover them with Mylar slips to allow for safe handling by students and research scholars. This archive, together with the Atlas formed a capstone to Ellie's second career, but she always carried the concerns and values of her first career with her.

In Greece and the Middle East she was a close observer of family life, local traditions and customs, and especially the activities of women and children. She photographed children as they tended cattle and helped their parents in the fields. She

watched villagers harvest olives, milk goats and make cheese in great cauldrons, and turn spits to roast lamb at saint's day festivals. She visited a family making the year's supply of rachi in a copper still over an open fire where potatoes cooked; passersby were summoned to share the bounty of brandy and baked potatoes. She helped another family in Crete make Easter cakes, went with them to Easter midnight service, and came out of the church to see Judas burned at the stake to exploding fireworks and shouts of "Christ is risen!". Invited into village kitchens, she learned to make tiropittas, moussaka, spanakopitta, and prize-winning baklava. Village women in many countries seemed uncertain of Ellie's status and social standing until they learned that she was the mother of three sons; then admiration spread and she felt the deference--the photo in her wallet was a hand with three aces.

In Jordan, she made friends with Mohamed, a dig cook who invited her to meet his family at a Palestinian resettlement center. Outside the door, he lowered his voice, "Please, what is the name of your oldest son?" As they stepped inside he waved his arm expansively to introduce, "Emlen's mother!" She clearly won the admiration of Amed, the government driver assigned to the Myers for a three-week stay in Jordan. For the first few days he wore a suit and tie and sat in the Toyota land-cruiser as Ellie and Wil inflated the blimp, flew the cameras, and helped the crew haul down the half mile of tether to recover the rolls of film. At the next site Amed came in work clothes, pitched in to help Ellie inflate the balloon from cylinders of helium, and soon took charge of the crew of Arab helpers. Amed knew no English, but Ellie found that German would do, he'd been a guest worker for five years in Dortmund. For a final week of projects at Petra, Ellie encouraged Amed to bring his wife along for a bit of vacation. She watched Ellie working with increasing interest and finally, on the last day joined the crew in her long gown and beads, hauling on the tether and helping to fold and roll up the balloon after the final deflation. Amed's gold teeth shone as he beamed with pride and approval. She had entered the world of men's work as Ellie had broken down the barrier.

Through twenty-two years of fieldwork, Ellie worked with cheerful energy and solid commitment. The months abroad were physically demanding, control of the balloon in a rising wind requiring teamwork, close attention and fast response. Often with little sleep, the group would be up in the dark, watching the wind, ready to inflate and fly the blimp at sunrise, sometimes for three hours with no time to rest, taking advantage of the raking light as the cameras were pulled down for each new roll of film. Nights camping in the mountains in April were wet and cold, sometimes freezing; in the desert temperatures would often reach a hundred and ten. Waiting for good weather, delayed air permits, or boat delays late with a shipment of hydrogen or helium tanks could be frustrating and discouraging. But spirits in camp were sustained by Ellie's contagious interest in her natural surroundings and her cheerful companionship with the student crew.

For someone who loved the outdoors in all seasons, the long fall days spent confined in the darkroom to print the season's negatives were a huge sacrifice. But at the

end of the day she felt an artist's pride as she spread the prints on drying racks. There stood the distillation of the partners' effort. Her images had captured the palaces of the Minoans on Crete, Mycenaean citadels in Greece, and whole cities in Turkey, in comprehensive high shots and hundreds of lower detail: Sardis, capital of King Croesus Lydia; Gordion, where King Midas lay under his great burial mound, and ancient Nicaea, with its three miles of standing walls and two-hundred towers. There were centers for the sacred games at Olympia and Nemea, centers for healing at Messene, Epidauros, and Samothrace. In the Jordanian desert were the black-basalt ruin of Umm el-Jimal, Byzantine Umm er-Rasas, Islamic Humeima, Herod's fortress at Machaerus, and the Nabataean capital city, Petra, fortified by its canyon walls of sheer red rock.

Ellie's contribution to the archaeological community might be measured by the Atlas of Crete on the shelf together with other publications, and the research archive of her prints in Athens and Boston. But it could also be measured by the many friendships she made at over a hundred excavations. From a husband's point of view, her contribution was a quiet joy at being alive, an appreciation of the world around her, and firm optimism, all of which helped support a partnership and an enterprise that could not have succeeded without her.

Eleanor Emlen Myers — Bibliography

J. Wilson Myers, Eleanor Emlen Myers, and Gerald Cadogan, eds.

The Aerial Atlas of Ancient Crete. Berkeley: University of California Press; London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 1992.

J. Wilson Myers and Eleanor Emlen Myers. "Low Altitude Photography." American Journal of Archaeology 99:1 (1995) 85-87

_____. "Low Altitude Aerial Photography at Petra." Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplement 14. The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research (1995) 279-92.

_____. "Bird's Eye View of the Ancient World." Archaeology 46:1 (1993) 40-51.

_____. "Low-Altitude Aerial Photography in Crete." Expedition 32:3 (1990) 31-33.

_____. "[Making] An Aerial Atlas of Ancient Crete." Archaeology 38 (l985) 18-25.

_____. "The Art of Flying: Balloon Archaeology." Archaeology 33 (l980) 33-40.

Eleanor Emlen Myers — Exhibits of Mounted Aerial Prints

1995	Explorers Club annual banquet, New York City
1994	Explorers Club annual banquet, New York City
1992	Archaeological Institute of America, St. Louis & St. Louis Art Museum
1991	University of Victoria, B.C.
	Vancouver Museum, B.C.
1990	Princeton University, Council of the Humanities
1988	Montshire Museum of Science, Hanover, New Hampshire
1987	Pancretan Association of America, Ann Arbor, Michigan
1986	San Francisco Society of the Archaeological Institute of America
1984	Trustees Meeting, American School of Classical Studies at Athens,
Century	Club, New York City
1983	National Meeting, Archaeological Institute of America, Cincinnati
l981	Centennial Celebration, American School of Classical Studies, in Athens
l979	Science and Archaeology Exhibit, National AIA Meeting, Boston
	Humanities Symposium, Kresge Art Museum, East Lansing, Michigan
	AIA Society Meeting & St. Louis Art Museum