

**ALICE
LEE
MARRIOTT**
1910-1992



**ETHNOLOGIST
OF
TRIBAL
HISTORY**

Alice Lee Marriott came to Muskogee at age 20 looking for a job. It was 1930 and the beginning of the Great Depression. She had been born in the Chicago suburb of Wilmette in 1910 and moved with her family to Oklahoma City in 1917. She was a magna-cum-laude graduate of the University of Oklahoma with degrees in English and French.

She took a job as a cataloger at the Muskogee Public Library. This involved writing the date, seller's name and cost in the book's inner margin. Today, most books come with the cataloging information already printed inside but this service did not become available until after World War II. Each library in the 1930's had to independently catalog each title they acquired. To catalog a book, Alice first identified the book's general topic. After this analysis, Alice typed one index card for each subject, author and title that described the new book. These cards were then filed in the library's card catalog system.

She devoted much of her time to building library collections on local history, and began studying the ethnology of Indian tribes of eastern Oklahoma. Alice's immersion in tribal history and genealogy sparked her interest in making it the focus of her life. Her interest in anthropology was partly derived from her English grandfather's interest in Egyptology. He liked taking her to the Field Museum in Chicago where she became fascinated with totem poles. For the next two years she worked at the Carnegie Building on East Broadway, cataloging books as part of a special Works Progress Administration (WPA) project.

Marriott wanted to attend graduate school to study anthropology. When she enrolled at OU, she discovered that there was no anthropology graduate degree program. She decided to earn a second undergraduate degree, doing extensive research involving several Oklahoma sites, including Spiro Mounds in Fort Coffee. Her fieldwork took her to southern Oregon to work with Modoc people and to southwestern Oklahoma to research the Kiowa people. She became the first woman to earn a degree in anthropology at OU.

From 1936 to 1942 Marriott served as the Oklahoma field representative for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB), a United States Department of the Interior program designed to revitalize Native economies through the production and marketing of American Indian arts. Her surveys of American Indian communities in Oklahoma detailed not only arts and crafts but also the living and economic conditions, customs, traditions, and beliefs. She also worked with American Indian artists at the American Indian exhibition at the 1939 World's Fair in San Francisco.

Marriott continued to write books on the subjects of Southwestern Indian culture the rest of her life. Oklahomans recognized her as one of the pioneering female anthropologists produced by the state. She died at age 82 in 1992. Alice Marriott is the most widely-read woman writer Oklahoma ever produced. Scholars rank her writing among the best on the ethnology (study of living cultures) of American Indians.