

Retyping the 'Female Archaeologist': The Career & Contributions of Dr. Emily J. Blasingham

By Alex E. Elliott (Indiana University)



Fig. 1: Emily Blasingham, ca. 1948. Image courtesy of the Glenn Black Lab.

Dr. Emily Jane Blasingham was born in Marion, Indiana, on April 24, 1926. After graduating from DePauw University with a double major in History and Spanish in 1948, Blasingham attended Indiana University and received her Master's in 1953 and her PhD in 1956, both in Anthropology.¹ This is a notable departure from the previous pioneering generation of women involved in Midwest archaeology who were often the informally educated wives of men involved in the field. Furthermore, uncommon during a time when many professional women's work was defined in relation to a husband, Blasingham never married. She was also notably very protective of women in archaeology.² Before she passed away in 2007, she accomplished a distinguished and diverse career.

Blasingham's curiosity about the early inhabitants of North America turned her to Glenn A. Black and the 1949 summer field school he ran at Angel Mounds, which she attended again in 1951. It was not unheard of for women to participate in excavations at Angel, though they were sometimes discouraged from attending and men were often preferred over women.

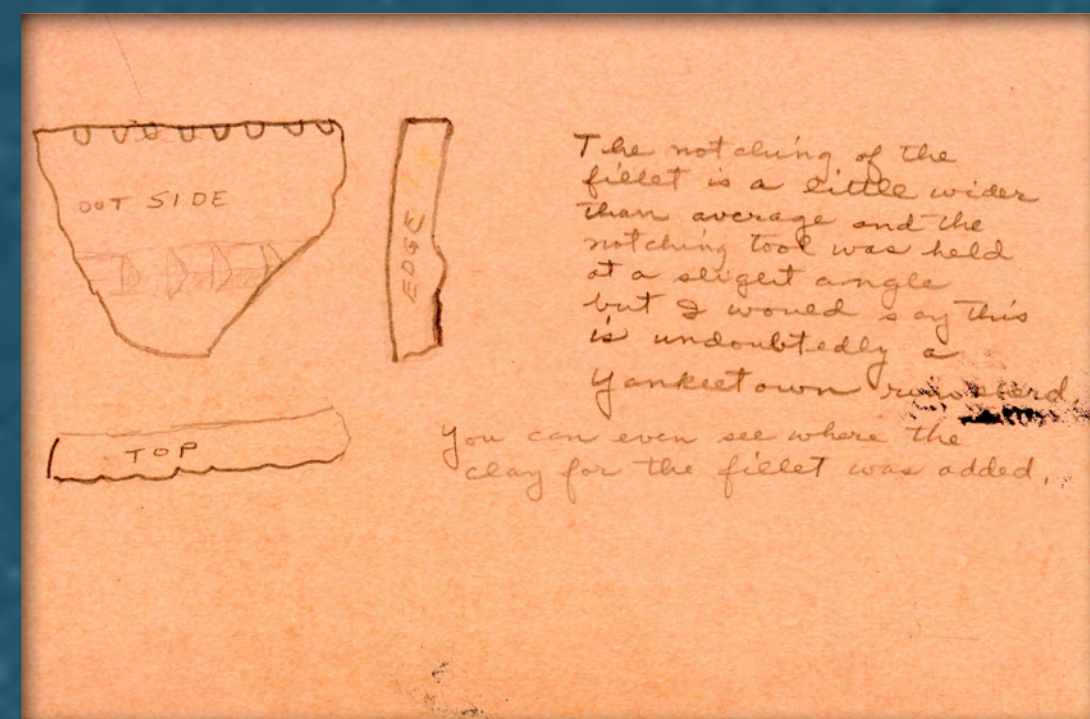


Fig. 3: Notes with Blasingham's 1965 Yankeetown research material.

In 1953, Blasingham wrote one of her most important works that greatly impacted the understanding of the Yankeetown Site—her Master's thesis, *Temporal and Spatial Distribution of the Yankeetown Cultural Manifestation* (1953). Not only was she the first to identify Yankeetown as a cultural complex, Blasingham also built the framework for Yankeetown ceramic decoration typology.³ While Dr. Brian Redmond refined her ceramic typology in 1990, Blasingham's research still proves to be among the primary references on Yankeetown Phase artifact assemblages.⁴

Blasingham worked at numerous sites undertaking a variety of responsibilities. In 1965, Blasingham returned to Yankeetown in an excavation performed by Loyola University, under contractual agreement with the National Park Service. This time in a position of leadership, she oversaw the excavation and the students, volunteers, and hired help.⁵ At Dickson Mounds in 1967, she was placed in charge of photography and records, while also assisting with the excavation of numerous burials. A year later, she was teaching the field school class at Dickson Mounds since she was the only one on the project with a teaching certificate.⁶

will probably be \$50.00. At the time you file your application you must understand that preference in the selection of students may be given in the following order:

Male students over women.
Anthropology majors.
To those within anthropology whose emphasis is upon archaeology.

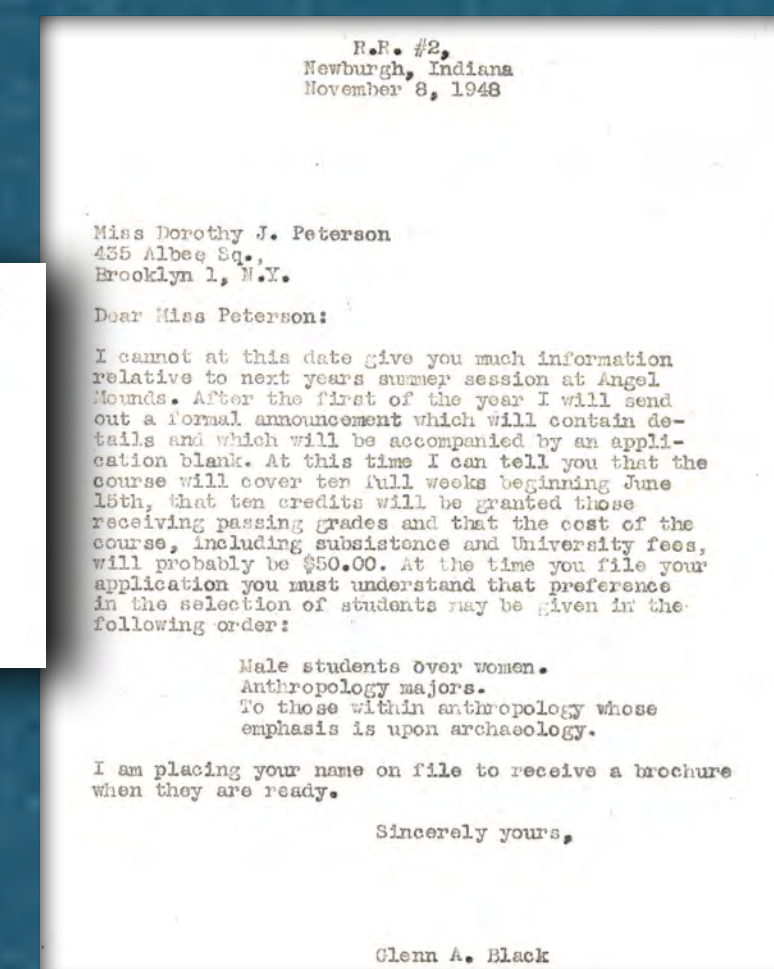


Fig. 2: Letter to Dorothy Peterson from Glenn Black, November 8, 1948.



Fig. 4: Eveland Site crew, 1960. Blasingham on the left. Image courtesy of the Illinois State Museum via Alan Harn.

While working for the University of Nebraska in 1962 at the Norton Reservoir in Kansas, it was noted that, "She and her cat arrived at the excavation in an early 1960s model Corvair, which intrigued everyone."⁷ As it happens, her convertible and "Figaro the black and white fuzzy cat" were in the field with Blasingham on more than one occasion.⁸

There is no doubt that Blasingham was an experienced archaeologist, but this was not her only professional or academic role. Still nurturing her interest in the native inhabitants of the Midwest, Blasingham's work turned in a more ethnohistoric direction during the time she worked on her PhD at Indiana University. Under the leadership of Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, Blasingham compiled records and helped draft reports for the Great Lakes-Ohio Valley Ethnohistory Project that were to be used in cases brought before the Indian Claims Commission. Blasingham's notes reveal her contributions, including reading and analyzing French sources.⁹ Within this period of time she also produced several publications: *The Miami Prior to the French and Indian War* (1955) and *The Depopulation of the Illinois Indians* (1956).



Fig. 5: Blasingham in her lab, ca. 1966. Image courtesy of Emily Blasingham via Amy L. Johnson.



Fig. 6: Angel Field School crew, 1949. Blasingham on far right. Image courtesy of the Glenn Black Lab.

Blasingham held two other important positions in her professional career, that of an instructor and of museum curator. In 1962, Blasingham took an ethnology position at the University of Nebraska.¹⁰ From at least 1962-1964, she was also an Assistant Curator of Anthropology at the University of Nebraska State Museum.¹¹ She also held Assistant and Associate Professorships at the University of Alabama, Loyola University, and Illinois State University, as well as the position of Head Curator of Anthropology at the Illinois State Museum.¹²

While Dr. Emily Blasingham's later years were spent doing charity work and being an active member of her church, her impact on Midwest archaeology is still remembered. Beyond her numerous scholarly contributions, her hard work helped to redefine the role of women in Midwest archaeology.

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¹ Ruthann Knudson, "Women in Reservoir Salvage Archaeology". In "Dam projects and the growth of American archaeology. The River Basin Surveys and the Interagency Archaeological Salvage Program," *Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press* (2014): 190.

² Cheryl Munson, 2017. Personal correspondence.

³ Phoebe Pritchett, "Was Yankeetown an Angel Mounds Progenitor?" *University of Cincinnati Master's thesis* (2012): 4.

⁴ Susan M. Alt, Meghan Buchanan, and Elizabeth Watts, "Looking For Yankeetown in Posey County, Indiana," *Indiana Archaeology* 6, no. 1 (2010): 29-30.

⁵ Emily Blasingham, "Excavation of Yankeetown (12W1)," *Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago* (1965): 5.

⁶ Alan Harn, 2017. Personal correspondence.

⁷ Knudson, 2014: 190.

⁸ Alan Harn, 2017. Personal correspondence.

⁹ Emily Blasingham Index Box. Great Lakes - Ohio Valley Ethnohistory Collection, Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin Archives, Indiana University, Bloomington.

¹⁰ Robert Hassler, "THE EFFECTS OF CRM: A SOCIOHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT LINCOLN." *Plains Anthropologist* 34, no. 124 (1989): 117.

¹¹ George Corner, 2017. Personal correspondence.

¹² Knudson, 2014: 190.

Figure 1: Emily Blasingham Application Photo, ca. 1948. Folder "Summer Sessions, 1949, Students Attending." Glenn Black Papers, Notes, Field School Files. Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin Archives, Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology.

Figure 2: Letter to Dorothy Peterson from Glenn Black, November 8, 1948. Folder "Summer Sessions, 1949, Students Attending." Glenn Black Papers, Notes, Field School Files. Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin Archives, Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology.

Figure 3: Note card from Blasingham's 1965 Yankeetown research notes. Located in the Associated Documents, Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology.

Figure 4: Eveland Site crew, 1960. Image courtesy of the Illinois State Museum via Alan Harn.

Figure 5: Blasingham in her lab, ca. 1966. Image courtesy of Emily Blasingham via Amy L. Johnson.

Figure 6: "Group Photo" Angel Field School, 1949. Located in the Media Collection, Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology.