ALICE STRUEVER (1931-2006): CRUCIAL CONTRIBUTOR TO FLOTATION METHODOLOGY

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Biography

Alice Melcher was born on September 1, 1931 in Cleveland, Ohio. Her parents were John Henry Melcher (1902-1977), an attorney, and Marian Louise Clark (1906-1991). She received her Bachelor of Science degree from Colby College (now Colby-Sawyer College) in 1953. Following graduation, she worked as a medical technologist at Research Lakeside Hospital for a year. In the years following, Alice taught at schools in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois (Peabody, 2017).

Alice married Stuart Struever, who was studying at Dartmouth College at the time, on August 21, 1956. They remained married for almost 27 years and had two children, Nathan and Hanna Struever. They filed for divorce in July 1, 1983. Pile was a local mechanic in Kampsville and was largely responsible for the recovery of their family home during fieldwork at Koster (Holton 1973). Center for American Archeology, n.d.). In addition to her roles at these sites, she is acknowledged for having been a large part in constructing maps of the Great Lakes Riverine Area (Struever, 1963) and is noted for "regularly assisting on [Struever's] weekend digs" at the Heineken site (Farnsworth 2009, 95). During her time in the field, Alice Struever was also responsible for feeding the students and volunteers (Figure 4), organizing dinners for visiting donors (Cheryl Munson and Jane Buikstra, personal communication). Alice Struever's role at these field sites was irreplaceable and her dedication to spending hours in the water looking for small ecofacts is largely responsible for the development of flotation techniques.

Contributions of Alice Struever

Once called a "mud puppie" by Gregory Perino, Alice dedicated an enormous portion of her time to wading in creeks and separating small artifacts from fill (1972, 87). In the early 1960s, Alice worked diligently at the excavation at Apple Creek Site in Greene County, Illinois. It was at this site that she was placed in charge of the water separation and of the students charged with the task. Alice was the first to develop the water separation technique, which is now widely used in archaeological excavations. She was one of the first to use flotation to recover small artifacts from soil, which is a technique that has become standard practice in modern archaeological excavations.

Flotation (or water separation) is a technique that uses water to isolate small archaeological artifacts, such as the remains of small animals or seeds, from the surrounding soil. Without this method, Stuart Struever (1968) maintains that "quantities of these small food remains dispersed through soil fills and submerged deposits would likely slip unnoticed through the screens" (550). Before flotation, this led to a greater recovery of large food sources and ultimately an over-representation of large mammal remains and an under-representation of small food remains that were lost as a result of flotation.

As its name suggests, water separation requires flowing water, often a small stream or creek, which carries away the silt. Substances float and sink at different rates depending on their size and density (Figure 1). For example, the remains of small artifacts are then sifted through the water, which is then poured through a small strainer. The remains are then washed and dried, and the process is repeated until all of the artifacts have been recovered (Figure 2).

Tracking down information on Alice Struever is proven to be a true challenge. She was one of many rarely mentioned "archaeology wires." Alice was trained in her role as an amateur archaeologist, and as such, her role in the development of these methods is often overlooked and mostly pushed aside to acknowledgments and brief mentions.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Leslie Drene and Kelsey Gittins for the invitation to take part in this symposium. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful people who helped me track down information on this elusive woman. Thanks to Kelsey Gittins for being a wonderful librarian and sending me decent scans of the American Antiquity images. Thanks to Dr. Jane Buikstra for sharing her photos and knowledge and to Dr. Della Cook, and Dr. Cheryl Munson for the time they dedicated to talking to me about Alice Struever's role in the development of flotation techniques.