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

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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. 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. Before she passed away in 2007, she accomplished a distinguished and diverse career.

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. 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.

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. 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.

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." As it happens, her convertible and "Figaro the black and white fuzzy cat" were in the field with Blasingham on more than one occasion.

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. Within this period of time she also produced several publications: The Miami Prior to the French and Indian War (1953) and The Depopulation of the Illinois Indians (1960).

Blasingham held two other important positions in her professional career, that of an instructor and of museum curator. In 1962, Blasingham took an ethnohistory position at the University of Nebraska. From at least 1962-1964, she was also an Assistant Curator of Anthropology at the University of Nebraska State Museum. 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.

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* Emily Blasingham, "Excavation of Yankeetown (12W1)", Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago (1965): 5.
* Knudson, 2014: 590.
* Emily Blasingham Index Box: Great Lakes - Ohio Valley Ethnohistory Collection, Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin Archives, Indiana University, Bloomington.