



GEORGE WALTON BRAINERD — 1909-1956

American archaeology suffered a severe loss on February 14, 1956, when George Walton Brainerd died at his home in Pasadena, California, from a heart attack induced by hardening of the arteries. His comparative youth and the complete unexpectedness of the event have made the tragedy especially shocking to the profession and to his numerous friends.

George Brainerd had at 47 already made a permanent and notable place for himself in his field and might have been expected to add greatly to his achievements during many years to come. He was born at Blacksburg, Virginia, in 1909, the son of Walton Kirk Brainerd and Margaret Smith Brainerd. His father had taught in the Agricultural Departments of West Virginia University and Virginia State College, and was serving with the Department of Agriculture in Washington at the time of his death, when George was 5 years old, and the latter thereafter lived with his mother at Martins Ferry, Ohio, until entering college.

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He received his bachelor's degree from Lafayette College in 1930, and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Ohio State University in 1935 and 1937 respectively. Although George's academic studies had been in the field of zoology, he never pursued that discipline professionally, but became increasingly absorbed in anthropology. From 1930 to 1934 he taught at the American Boys' College (now called Elborz College) in Teheran, Iran, and during that period worked at Tepe Hissar and under Erich Schmidt of the University Museum of Pennsylvania at Rayy. He also supervised the construction of the first scientific laboratory building in Iran. It was these experiences that kindled a deep and enduring interest in archaeology.

On his return to the United States he worked on technical studies in ceramics at Ohio State University and also joined the staff of the Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition, with which he was field archaeologist for 3 summers, in the excavation of Pueblo remains in the Marsh Pass area of Northeast Arizona. This work was codified in a report in which he collaborated as a joint author during the winters of 1937-38 and 1938-39. During the same period he also worked on the animal bones from Fort Ancient, Ohio, and was for one season a member of the Awatovi Expedition of the Peabody Museum of Harvard.

During 1939 he was a regional supervisor of a W.P.A. archaeological project in Tennessee, and later that year joined the archaeological staff of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and began that part of his career which was to prove the most productive and significant.

His work had come to the notice of A. V. Kidder of the Institution, who saw in him a man capable of carrying forward the study of Yucatan pottery begun by George C. Vaillant and continued by Henry B. Roberts. At that time a vast collection of sherds had been assembled but still required systematic study and correlation. He attacked this problem with his usual vigor, and after 6 weeks of preparation with Anna O. Shepard, set out for Yucatan.

For more than a year he worked in the field, where he displayed not only a great capacity for accomplishment but also a remarkable ability to enlist the loyalty and cooperation of others. His ingenuity and imagination were shown in many ways: by the invention of instruments to measure hardness of pottery, to calculate vessel sizes from sherds, and by his clear grasp of a very complex problem and his

capacity to marshal an overwhelming mass of data.

In 1941 he went to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he worked on his Yucatan report, interrupting this effort by small excavations in Yucatan for the purpose of filling the gaps that appeared in the ceramic sequence that he was developing. Following an interval of war service he returned to Yucatan, and with Robert E. Smith and Karl Ruppert excavated in the Rio Bec and Chenes areas, followed by several months of laboratory work in Merida. On the basis of the information thus assembled, he formulated a time sequence divided into 14 periods from before the time of Christ to the Spanish colonial period. The report on this whole problem of Maya ceramic chronology and the relationships between the Northern and Southern parts of the area has been prepared for publication and will undoubtedly become one of the basic works in Maya archaeology.

During his first stay in Yucatan, George married Katharine Babcock of Los Angeles, who survives him, together with 4 children: John Kirk, Margaret Elizabeth, Katharine Anne, and George Ware. During World War II he served in the Special Devices Division of United States Naval Intelligence in Washington, in China, India and Ceylon, and at Brookhaven Laboratories, with the rank of Lieutenant. In that period his varied interests and ingenuity were again demonstrated by his invention of a lens to correct for distortion of the image on a radar screen and of a device by which oblique photographs could be rectified for use in aerial mapping.

Upon separation from the Navy in 1946 he assumed the dual roles of Assistant Professor (later promoted to Associate Professor) of Anthropology at the University of California at Los Angeles and of Staff Archaeologist at the Southwest Museum. The burdens of these tasks did not, however, prevent his continued field research in archaeology, and he spent several seasons in the Valley of Mexico under the auspices of the Museum, the University, and the Carnegie Institution. He was actively planning another excavation in Tepic at the time of his death. He also lectured as Exchange Professor in 1954 at Universidad Autónoma de México.

His activities were not limited to Middle America, however, for he devoted much time also to archaeological problems in California,

including a re-examination of the Lake Mohave sequence and the supervision of an exhaustive bibliography of Southern California archaeology and ethnology. He was one of the founders and first president of the Archaeological Survey Association of Southern California, and acted at various times as president of the Southwestern Anthropological Association, the Southern California Society of the Archaeological Institute of America, the Western Branch of the American Anthropological Association, and as a member of the editorial board of the University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology.

In addition to numerous published articles his major contributions to the literature have been the unpublished report on Maya ceramics and his preparation of a third edition of Sylvanus G. Morley's *The Ancient Maya*, which was fortunately completed before his death. This excellent revision will bring up to date one of the great classics in its field.

The foregoing summary of the professional achievements of an active and useful life is impressive enough. But it is quite inadequate to portray the warmth and strength of the human personality. George Brainerd was vastly more than a capable scholar and an efficient workman. He was an inspired and inspiring teacher, endowed with scholarly devotion, a remarkable memory, great technical competence, unflinching humor, patience, and insight, whose influence on his students will long survive him. He was a dependable companion under all circumstances, as I can testify from the experience of 3 intimate seasons of association in the field, 2 seasons of daily collaboration in laboratory research and writing, and almost 25 years of sustained friendship. He was independent but at the same time truly and unselfconsciously altruistic, and instinctively followed a principle of doing what he felt to be right without concern for self-aggrandizement in the eyes of others. Perhaps his charm was due to the fact that he had come to terms with himself and with life.

I am sure that I speak for an unnumbered host of people of all ages and in many walks of life in saying that he cannot be replaced in my own memory or theirs. Perhaps our mutual feelings can be most simply and effectively summed up in the estimate of one of his Maya workmen in Yucatan—that he was *muy caballero*.

WATSON SMITH

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