

An Anthropologist's Arrival: A Memoir.* Ruth Underhill. Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Stephen E. Nash, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014. 226 pp.

Reviewed by Alex Golub

Ruth Underhill was an anthropologist who studied under Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. She is best remembered for her widely taught *Autobiography of a Papago Indian* (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1936), popular writings about Indian life, and for being a pioneering female anthropologist. Like many Boasians, Underhill had an unconventional life. Born to a wealthy New York Quaker family, she worked as a novelist and social worker before beginning her Ph.D., which she earned in 1937 at the age of 54. She worked in various government agencies as an expert on Indians, producing many pamphlets and shorter ethnographic works, before taking a position in the anthropology department at the University of Denver. Underhill eventually lived to be 100 years old, witnessing the rise of anthropology in the 20th century, and was recognized by Indian communities for her strong personal commitment to them. Although Underhill has been the subject of several strong biographical essays, this is the first book-length account of her life. Beautifully and simply written, it paints a compelling and sometimes sad picture of a woman eager to live a life that her era taught her she did not deserve and could not have.

This volume is a product of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science's efforts to catalog their collection of her papers. The "autobiography" is a compilation of a long autobiographical essay by Underhill that has been edited together with descriptions of her life taken from a series of interviews. Although this stitched-together quality could be jarring to read, the book flows naturally. The quality of the editing of the body text is typical of the care that went into the preparation of this manuscript as a whole: the authors have done an excellent job tracking down obscure biographical references to Underhill's friends and family and have chosen an excellent selection of photographs from the archives. Good editing is often invisible—its job is to hide the seams and stitching that put a book together. In this case, however, the unusual care the volume received is noticeable and much appreciated.

One additional sign of editorial care is the excellent introduction, which provides an overview of the production of the book, contextualizes Underhill in the history of anthropology and, most importantly, presents an analysis of the central themes of Underhill's biography: her damaging, stifling upbringing, her skill as an ethnographer, and her life-long quest to free herself from the Victorian mores she internalized. The editor's writing is insightful and almost soulful in the portrait it paints of this slightly tragic, but still very powerful woman. It is among the best parts of the book. This volume is clearly a labor of love.

The body of the book is divided in two parts. The first covers Underhill's life from childhood to middle age. The second begins with her decision to enter graduate school and continues through her career in the Office of Indian Affairs. Each part is broken into short chapters, which are

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themselves divided into short sections, some a mere paragraph long. The body of the book is only 188 pages long and covers a century. The book does not focus on any one period of time; as a result, many readers may be disappointed in the superficial coverage of the autobiography. Readers interested in the history of anthropology will find the portraits of Underhill's contemporaries too brief—especially those of Gladys Reichard, H. Marie Wormington, and Henrietta Schmerler, who have not received the attention that Boas and Benedict have. Indians and scholars of the Southwest will wish for a more detailed account of the Southwest than just the rough circumstances that produced Underhill's published works. Scholars interested in Underhill's youth and the gender issues it presents will not find the second half of the book useful. Even though Underhill's introspection orbits constantly around themes of constraint, self-imposed and otherwise, she does not delve deeply into her psyche the way some authors might. In the end the book is, like its author, idiosyncratic in its determination to do what it wants, even if that is not what others expect from it.

What saves the volume from drifting out of focus entirely is Underhill's prose. It would be a bit too purple to say that the book is written with the same carefully crafted simplicity as a Quaker chair, but there is something to the metaphor. Underhill was brought up in a Quaker household and was highly educated and learned Latin, French, German, Italian, and Spanish in addition to Indian languages. Her prose lacks the romantic oozing of Tennyson and the other poets she effortlessly quotes, but it is still the result of immersion in this tradition. Her writing's lucid, simple clarity has much in common with the style of her mentor, Ruth Benedict. But there is also a laconic, homespun quality to it that must be traced back to the American West. For instance: "Boas did have to defend himself—mainly for being a Jew and thinking the Indians were human. He talked about the Indians as though their plans were just as good as our plans" (146). Her use of metaphor, often twisting it off in an unexpected direction, makes it clear that still waters run deep, and that a good deal of imagination and technique lie beneath the surface of her simple, occasionally saucy prose. As a result the book is almost compulsively readable, guiding the reader carefully through a difficult childhood that other authors might over-dramatize. It is, in short, a great read.

It is particularly interesting to see this book come out of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Not only does it demonstrate the power of curatorial work to produce publications, but it also presents a slightly new "business model" for archivists. *An Anthropologist's Arrival* essentially serves as bait to draw interested people not only to Underhill more generally, but to the 85 linear feet of material that is now available for research in the archive. Unfortunately, the finding aid and the archive itself is not very accessible online—to truly attract future researchers, this book should be buttressed by a more robust web presence for the museum, the archives, and especially the finding aid for Underhill's papers.

This book would work well in an introductory course in folklore or anthropology, especially when paired with *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman* or Underhill's government publications, most of which are now available in open access versions. It is reasonably priced, accessible, and presents an excellent picture of a role model for respectful anthropological engagement with Indian communities. Although she is often seen as a role model for women, men have a lot to learn from Underhill as well.

In sum, this excellent book deserves a wider audience than just those interested in folklore, anthropology, Indians, and the Southwest. The editors have done a superb job of bringing Underhill's unique voice back to us all.

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