

Jane Cape, "My Years of Retirement, 1952-1958"

Jane Cape of Dodgeville, WI was one of the few genuine experts in the country in the field of Home Economics at the time of her appointment to the Antioch College faculty in 1926. As Chair of the dept., she guided one of the more rigorous Home Economics programs among small colleges, emphasizing chemistry, nutrition, and child development. She also established one of the first nursery schools in the state of Ohio in a long gone architectural gem called Day House.

Twenty six years later, facing mandatory retirement, Cape went to Bagdad, Iraq on a Fulbright Award to duplicate her accomplishments at Antioch: namely, form a Home Economics department and nursery school for a small liberal arts college. Following that experience she returned to Yellow Springs and began assisting Bessie Totten in the College Archives. She was appointed the second Curator of Antiochiana after Totten's death in 1963, administering the collections until her own death in 1975.

Jane Cape recounted her time in Bagdad to her friends in the following document, perhaps as an annual New Year's letter. The late 1950s were a particularly turbulent period in the modern history of Iraq, and her tenure coincided with much unrest, and she narrowly missed the bloody July 14 Revolution, a violent coup d'tat that overthrew the British backed Hashemite monarchy of King Faisal II.

My Years of Retirement

1952-1958

Anyone approaching retirement these days actually finds himself on the end of a springboard. From this vantage point one surveys the multiple opportunities on every hand to utilize ones resources further afield, thereby retaining ones own mental and emotional flexibility. On the other hand, one faces a series of major adjustments, personal and otherwise'some merely superficial,

others more fundamental. To jump too far or too deep into new territory can be risky at this stage of the game.

In June, 1952, I found myself facing this future as countless others have done. With only a few plans in mind, I knew there were two things I did not want to do. If possible, I did not want to cease being useful in some way, nor did I want to begin to feel old, for I never had. Playing an additional part in my decision to consider some gainful occupation, was the fact that since many of my years of service were before pension funds were generally established, my retirement reserves were not adequate for 1952 standards.

When I wrote in April for information and application forms concerning Fulbright awards, I had no premonition of how fast things were going to happen. In May, Washington called asking permission to put my name on the panel for consideration for Iraq. Though I had planned to be with my mother that coming year, I consented. July 10th I moved out of my office in the Day House where I had been for 26 years and turned the keys to my little home on Phillips Street

over to the Chatterjees for the following year. That summer in Madison was a strenuous one, for I was holding fort for the care of my 90 years old mother and had two sisters undergoing surgery. To add to my dilemma, the Indian embassy phoned to ask me to report to Baroda, India in three weeks'the position I had wanted most.

August 12th I received an award from the Fulbright Board as Lecturer in Home Economics in Queen Aliyah College'the only government college for women in Iraq. I had already mulled it over for a week when my mother said,

Of course you are going! I'll manage somehow'you still have your life to live!

Thus she made the decision for me. In her thinking, this was an opportunity for my services to be put to better use. Just three weeks for everything'shots, passports, baggage, visa, and reservations and good-byes.

Iraq is associated in the minds of most people with two things'oil and antiquities. The latter is of longer standing for explorers from the west made pilgrimages to Babylon and Nineveh long before the mineral wealth began to interest foreign industries.

September 20th I set off for Bagdad via PAA [Pan American Airways] by way of London and Beirut where I waited a week for a flight to Baghdad (now you can get several flights a day on the big lines). To find oneself suddenly in Beirut only a few hours away from New York is strange indeed. Altho westernized Beirut is the

Paris of the Middle East

, it was a shock to see that men were literally beasts of burden with bales, furniture, and heavy crates carried on their backs with only the aid of a head strap. American cars scattered donkeys, horses, and natives as they raced down the narrow winding streets, using their horns more than their brakes. On all sides were dark, immobile faces, veiled women, music with a plaintive flavor and exotic lilt which gave the place an air of mystery. This was the Middle East! The call to prayer'kneeling men in the courtyards or on the banks of the sea bowing to Mecca'the babble of tongues in the streets, stately caravans of camels swinging down the dusty highways'burros loaded with bundles many times their size and often referred to as the Fords of the Middle East

Finally, I was off to Baghdad. As we continued over the alluvial plains of the Tigris and Euphrates, called Mesopotamia, we circled over Babylon and the great arch of Ctesiphon. It seemed a dry desolate land. Invading armies had long ago destroyed the network of irrigation canals. Anyone hearing the name Baghdad conjures up visions of minarets, mosques, magic carpets, 40 thieves, and a Thousand and One Nights. I think of it as the city of a thousand and one hazards with its cluttered streets, and holes and obstructions on the walks to slip into and trip over.

My living quarters were at the Zia'one of the four first class hotels according to Iraq standards (U.S. 3rd class). My room had a private bath, ceiling fans, air coolers, and that rare luxury, central heating. Private housing is very expensive, demanding a year's rent in advance, and involving the problem of furniture, house boy, and endless inconveniences and responsibilities.

Then one would need a car to live out. Except for ten weeks during which I lived with a Palestinian family, I remained at the Zia hotel the duration of my assignment. The Zia is further described in Agatha Christie's book

We Came to Baghdad

. One never knew living at the crossroads of such opportunity, what sort of people would be next to cross one's path here'kings, princes, sheiks, foreign minsters the UN Secretary and even junketing U.S. Senators. No matter what the temperature, hotel living at the Zia was never dull.

My reception in Baghdad was a warm one'in fact, 110 degrees. The host of sand flies enthusiastically welcomed a new victim and made raw beef of me in no time. B6 repellant became my constant companion thereafter.

Meals were ample with abundance of delicious fruits. We Westerners labeled fresh vegetables, milk, cream, butter as Taboo for our diets, unless we were willing to risk "Baghdad Tummy", a common ailment. I found myself peeling all my fruit, including grapes. Though the water was good and safe, my chief beverage was tea.

Transportation was by bus or taxi. Since Baghdad had excellent bus service, I made use of it enroute to college, but I had to use taxis

in the evening since it is not the custom for women to use public conveyances at night. The taxis

had no meters so one had to do a good bit of bargaining before hiring one.

Poverty is conspicuous in the Arab world due to the system of land ownership and primitive farm methods reminiscent of Bible times. The Bedouin remains as unchanged as his camel, the date palm, and the sand; as together, they reign over their desert kingdom. The camel represents not only a vehicle of transportation, but a medium of exchange, the dowry of the bride, and the wealth of the sheik. Two-thirds of Iraq is still inhabited by tribal groups living as they did a thousand years ago.

Queen Aliyah College was established by the government in 1947 as a Women's Liberal Arts College. Its four hundred students are the daughters of ultra conservative families. Education for women is not considered essential, especially beyond the intermediate grades. Though all colleges are open to women, few enroll due to tradition. There are 12,000 women teachers (many married) as it is one profession that the Moslem family condone for their daughters since the schools are all non co-educational. Other occupations such as nursing, clerking, secretarial or social work are looked down upon. Wages are the same for women as men.

Queen Aliyah College took a step forward in 1952 by introducing four new fields, namely: Physical Education, Social Welfare, Home Economics, and Secretarial which were unacceptable

professions for women. The Dean, a native, had the vision and courage to pioneer in these new fields. Three foreign Home Economists were assigned to develop a four years program sponsored by three agencies

Fulbright, Point Four [the Truman administration's technical assistance program for developing nations], and F.A.O [The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations]. Though we had only the Freshman class this first year, we offered courses to students in other fields. My own assignment was Child Development. In the meantime we were busy planning and equipping laboratories to fit Arabian needs.

After the first six weeks of classes, rioting broke out in the three colleges in the city and quickly snowballed into a general riot accompanied with destruction and much bloodshed. The cabinet resigned and there was utter chaos for 24 hours. Then the army took over and patrolled the streets with machine guns. Schools were closed for two months, so I read everything on the Middle East and enjoyed the sunshine and the terrace on the banks of the Tigris, as things gradually calmed down. There were tense days for awhile, especially for foreigners and those living in the hotels.

Between these major upheavels in normal living were the minor adjustments to another way of life. It was disturbing at first to have the week begin on Saturday, find oneself working Sunday, and having Friday as a holiday for worship. The two hour siesta in the afternoon, during which everything closed was in keeping with the pace of life in this Biblical land of

Tomorrow

and

Never mind

when things just didn't get done or went too slowly. When one reacted at first with intolerance at this state of affairs, one learned, on the other hand, a new meaning of time and place, from the patient Arab.

There was the petty and constant confusions of locating ones class rooms when the schedule was always in a state of flux'of pronouncing roll call names: Widad, Wafylis, and Maha'my attempts brought laughter from the class. At first they all looked alike'no blue eyes, red hair, or blondes among them to help me distinguish. But after a month I managed to get along without an interpreter, although I would grope for words that they could understand, and sometimes resorted to drawing and acting. This difficulty with the language (even though English) made every hour of teaching equivalent to three in this country.

The women students were emotionally immature and socially lacked initiative and motivation. Student strikes were prevalent'if the examinations were too hard, or scheduled at the wrong time they would simply strike. The constant excuses, attempts at cheating, the apparent demands and rudeness were unpleasant surprises until one realized the tremendous importance the pupils attached to marks, more vital to them than knowledge. Students are terrified at examinations for they put too much weight on them. They expect to learn by rote vast quantities of unrelated facts gleaned from their notes. There is little encouragement for initiative in thinking, developing analytical ability or power of discrimination. Little effort is expended, unfortunately, in fostering interest in personal philosophy.

But there was Christmas

! The Dean granted me permission to leave over the holidays to go to Cairo, Damascus and Jerusalem. These trips at Christmas time were one of Heaven's gifts and each trip has its own story'from riding a camel to the pyramids, to the Yuletide pilgrimage to Bethlehem.

In 1954 the Iraq government made a request for my services as Head of the Department. We were ready to commence the third class year. The laboratories were all equipped except our nursery school which was opened in January 1956, just thirty years after the establishment of the one at Antioch. This was the first one in Iraq.

In the fall of 1956 the Suez Crisis precipitated sympathy strikes among the college groups, but was checked before it got out of hand. Colleges and schools were closed for two months. Students and faculty who in anyway participated were jailed, tried, and penalized. Many of the top level professors, including two Deans, were demoted or transferred for signing a petition. Since July 14,

58, these are the very people riding
in the saddle

With the government so unstable (I had five different ministers of Education my first year), it seemed wise to return to the States for the summer. From the map you can see I varied my trips to and from Bagdad by going through 35 countries, seventy cities and villages, with mileage equivalent to five trips around the world on twelve different airlines. Among the interesting passengers with whom I shared flights and ocean voyages were Princess Beatrice and her sister from Holland, the Crown Prince of Denmark, Ambassadors, Miss Universe of 1956, and even the Holiday on Ice troupe.

I remained in Baghdad long enough to see two classes graduate in Home Economics (55 in all), and open two new fields for graduates'one as an intern for Dietetics in the Institute of Nutrition (the first in Iraq). Another graduate took a position as Home Economist in a new Community Development Project under Point Four and the Iraq Government. Both of these girls were in training under Foreign experts. Among the other graduates, many married by parental arrangement, some went into teaching, and others remained at home. Their education is entirely free at the time, but they must work for the government year for year, or pay the cost of their education.

At present we have ten graduates here in the States for further study sponsored by the Iraq government. They will return to take the places of the foreign specialists now working with the government. I am very proud of some of these girls, knowing the hurdles they had to overcome to be here at all. They must make a terrific adjustment when they return. Most moslem women live in an environment of insecurity that stems from the philosophy of the Koran that men shall have preeminence. Thus, they remain very sheltered. If single they remain in the father or older brother's home.

During my last two years in Baghdad, I was on two major committees: a curriculum committee for revising the Girls

program at all levels, and a Nutrition committee on which I acted as Chairman, with

representatives from various allied agencies concerned with the nutritional aspects of the local foods, such as the date, which must be supplemented with other local sources of food high in protein and vitamins to be palatable and nutritious date bar. This nutrition problem was a real challenge.

It is not easy to understand the ways of another people, though there are those who think that understanding

is a matter of simply demonstrating the superiority of our own ways and democratic ideas convincingly enough. This imposition accounts for a great deal of the frustration and misunderstanding that many encounter after living and working with people of an entirely different culture. The adaptation of Home Economics teaching in every area to this completely different way of life and economy was a difficult task. It is not a simple matter to be helpful on an elemental level without exuding a little feeling of superiority, no matter how hard one tried to be humble.

But though often it seemed that

progress

moved only in centimeters, I returned to the United States in September 1957, at that most hopeful

stage in progression when one feels the point of potential expansion has been reached. Then suddenly, came the July

coup

, a manifestation of the vast unrest in the Middle East, the general lack of security, and with the uncertain position of the government, one wonders if one's mental and spiritual energies have gone forth to a lost cause. One can only hope that despite the upheaval, some fragments of the work accomplished remain.

In looking back over some of the frustrating events of this experience—two major riots, a flood, two broken arms, the death of the Dean, student strikes, changes in government, lack of sanitation facilities, constant misunderstandings due to language barriers, it might seem to add up to a

misadventure

any of you would not care to have shared. But

between the lines

I know you have read that the compensations were there ten fold. I am forever grateful I had the good fortune to have had the vitality, health, and varied enough experiences in the field of work needed (and the PH.D which is more essential for status

in these countries than at home), and that at the right moment when the opportunity came to serve in these developing countries, I was free of other obligations. These Iraq experiences contributed greatly to my better understanding of the problems of cultures other than our own and perhaps have resulted in my becoming a better ambassador.

The

July Coup

has given me heartaches; for many of my friends and colleagues are loyal to the old government and now stand trial yet others are in the top levels of the present government. Iraq trials are an affront to the conscience of mankind political trials conducted without regard to justice. Those now governing are passing judgment on those who formerly governed, and are conducted with all the ruthlessness of the Nazi purge trials. The shoe (has been) on the other foot during 1956 when many of the present rulers were tried in the same fashion.

I returned, looking forward to more leisure at my own fireside. So far the

leisure

has eluded me. I spent the past year shifting back and forth from Yellow Springs to Wisconsin to be with my own family (12,000 miles by car), refurnishing my little home, giving talks on my experiences in different places, holding down the Farwell Farm for two months in summer while the family toured Europe and visited their daughter [Cape's niece and Antioch College class of 1938] Jane Farwell Hinrichs in Germany.

Now, since October, I have assumed my new duties as Associate Curator of the Antiochiana (collection at the library) for part time and find myself absorbed in this new work. This gives me an anchor and a new interest and the opportunity to be with my old associates and friends while enjoying my own home after five years of hotel living.

My latch string is out for any of you or yours coming to Yellow Springs. Keep me posted as to your moves.

With the greetings in the language of the country

Salaam Allah ay koom

(God give you peace) I send my sincere wishes.

Sincerely,

Jane Cape'hGeb'hGeb'h"{}

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Normal

Antioch

Microsoft Office Word

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