

The following obituary appeared in the NEW YORK SUN newspaper in early December, 2003.

Rhoda Metraux, 89, Noted Anthropologist

Close Collaborator With Margaret Mead at the American Museum

By STEPHEN MILLER Staff Reporter of the Sun

Rhoda Metraux, who has died at age 89, was for three decades the closest collaborator of fellow anthropologist Margaret Mead. Together they wrote several books, as well as Mead's celebrated monthly column in Redbook magazine.

Much of her anthropological research concerned the study of childhood, mental health, and national culture traits, such as her study of the "image of the scientist" in England and America.

Born in Brooklyn to parents of German extraction, she attended the Packer Collegiate Institute and Vassar before taking a job at the Oxford University Press in New York. Having become fascinated with anthropology, she enrolled in graduate studies in 1939 at Yale University, where Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the founders of the discipline, had recently begun teaching. A whirlwind romance with one of her professors, Alfred Metraux, led to marriage and then to her first fieldwork, in Haiti, where he already had research in progress.

When Alfred Metraux began working at the Smithsonian the next year, she moved with him to Washington, and soon became a research assistant to Margaret Mead, then also at the Smithsonian. Like many anthropologists during the war, Mead oriented her studies toward the war effort, and was running the Committee on Food Habits of the National Research Council. Soon Metraux was investigating American consumer behavior, particularly the hoarding of food in response to wartime rationing. She followed this up with a comparative study of responses to shortages in Mexico.

Later on in the war, she worked with the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor to the CIA) to evaluate morale in the armed forces of Japan and Germany.

After the war, she returned to her studies, earning her Ph.D. in 1951 from Columbia for a study of Haitian Creole kinship structures. Her Haitian fieldwork segued into a specialization in French culture and society, which she published in two volumes in collaboration with Mead, "The Study of Culture at a Distance" (1953) and "Themes in French Culture" (1954). In 1953-54, she directed a project on German national character, in which she paid particular attention to children's drawings. Later, she was to extend this interest to children's drawings of satellites and space.

In addition to her Haitian fieldwork, she conducted investigations in

Montserrat and in New Guinea, where she followed up in the 1960s and 1970s on fieldwork Mead and anthropologist Gregory Bateson had done there in the 1930s.

In 1962, she warned that the public had a distorted image of the scientist as someone who "wears a white coat, works in a laboratory filled with mysterious machinery and glass bottles, and spends his time chiefly in pouring things from one test tube to another." She added that he is feared because "he has very great power to aid mankind or to destroy it."

She was divorced in 1959 from Alfred Metraux (who had been instrumental in the composition of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights), and lived for many years with Mead, first on Waverly Place and later on Central Park West, around the corner from the American Museum of Natural History.

"They were partners," said her son Daniel Metraux, a professor of Asian Studies at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia. "They shared a personal and collaborative relationship." Mead also became Daniel's godmother.

In addition to doing much of the actual writing in some of Mead's books and the Redbook column, Metraux also helped to train the legion of "Meadettes," young female anthropologists who flocked to Mead in the 1960s and 1970s, according to Jane Howard, author of "Margaret Mead: A Life." Metraux was at Mead's deathbed in 1978, and she told the Associated Press that she saw her smile at the end. "It was as if she knew where she was going and it was where she wanted to go," Metraux said.

In 1980, she retired to a small cabin in Vermont where she lived until a few years ago.

Born Rhoda Bubendey October 18, 1914, in Brooklyn; died November 26 in Vermont of Alzheimer's disease; survived by her son Daniel and four grandchildren.

Wilton Dillon, Emeritus Scholar at the Smithsonian Institution, wrote the following obituary for the newsletter of the American Anthropological Association.

Dr. Rhoda Metraux, a pioneer cultural anthropologist who worked in World War II to help the U.S. and allies understand themselves and their adversaries, died in Barton, Vt. November 26, 2003. She suffered from Alzheimer's disease. With the advent of U.S. and U.N. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, her work on "national character" is taking on contemporary significance by scholars and public servants interested in the application of the behavioral sciences to making foreign policy. Apart from public affairs issues, Metraux explored the intersections of anthropology, psychotherapy and literature. Her comparative and qualitative approaches to anthropology drew upon her research in both nation-states and the Iatmul people of New Guinea.

As a collaborator of Margaret Mead (1901-1978), Metraux co-edited with Mead the 1953 book, *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, and *Themes in French Culture*. Both were re-published during the Mead centennial in 2001, and were cited in the Smithsonian-Library of Congress symposium, *The Interplay of Cultures: Whither the U.S. in the World? From 1947-53*, she was a key participant in the Columbia University Research on Contemporary Cultures Project financed, in part, by the Office of Naval Research. Readers of *Redbook* magazine in the 1960's and '70's could find her insights and findings reflected in Margaret Mead's column aimed mainly at women.

Born Rhoda Bubendey in Brooklyn, N.Y. October 18, 1914 to a prominent German banking family, she was educated at Packer School, and studied literature at Vassar College, graduating in 1934, and serving later as an editor at Oxford University Press. Columbia University awarded her a Ph.D. in 1951 for her work on Haitian Voodoo. Her varied research projects included studying cultural factors influencing physical and mental health of Chinese expatriates in New York separated from their homeland by the Communist revolution.

Like Ruth Benedict, another Mead collaborator, who helped influence the retention of the Emperor system in Japan, Metraux served on the planning staff of the Office of Strategic Services. She estimated the morale of armed forces of Germany and Japan. Coincidentally, her husband, the celebrated Swiss-Argentine onetime Smithsonian anthropologist, Alfred Metraux, participated in studies of the Strategic Bombing Survey of Germany. (He was the founder of anthropology in Argentina, and author of classical works on the sculpture of Easter Island, the history of the Inca, Haitian voodoo, and of early UNESCO statements on race. He is to be the focus of a Smithsonian exhibition in 2006 on the history of 20th century anthropology to which both made unique contributions). Their marriage ended in divorce. The intellectual legacy of both parents has enriched the career of their son, Dr. Daniel Metraux, founder of the Department of Asian Studies, Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, Va.

During her professional career, Dr. Metraux served as Research Associate at the American Museum of Natural History, an advisor to the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Smithsonian, and as a consultant to the Institute for Intercultural Studies of New York, founded by Margaret Mead.

Her decades of association with Mead made her particularly valuable to the

Library of Congress in processing the vast collection of Mead manuscripts and related memorabilia deposited there.

A memorial service will be held in Greensboro, Vt. in July, 2004.

Survivors include a brother, Paul Bubendey, Vero Beach, Fl. a son, Daniel Metraux, Staunton, Va., a grandson, David Metraux, Syracuse, N.Y., and a granddaughter, Katherine Metraux, Pioneer, California