

**AITCHISON, Beatrice.** July 18, 1908–September 22, 1997.

GOUCHER COLLEGE (BA 1928), JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY (MA 1931, PhD 1933), UNIVERSITY OF OREGON (MA 1937).

Beatrice Aitchison was born in Portland, Oregon, the daughter of Bertha Beatrice (Williams) (1877–1935) and Clyde Bruce Aitchison (1875–1962). Her parents were natives of Iowa and married in 1906. She had a younger brother, Clyde Bruce Aitchison Jr. (1909–1969), who became a lawyer. Her mother was a musician and singer; her father was a lawyer who had a distinguished career serving on state and federal regulatory commissions and in private practice.

Clyde B. Aitchison, her father, earned a BSc from Hastings College in 1893, an MA from the University of Oregon in 1915, and a PhD in economics from American University in 1932. After completing his undergraduate work, he studied law in a private law firm in Iowa and was admitted to the Iowa bar in 1896. He moved to Oregon in 1903 and served on various regulatory commissions there until 1916. The family moved to Washington, D.C., when he became solicitor for the National Association of Railway Commissioners in 1916. In 1917 he became a member of the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and served as its chairman four times before his retirement in 1952. He then had a private law practice until his death. He had an extensive record of writings, lectured at American University for a dozen years, and received numerous awards, including honorary LLD degrees from Hastings College and the University of Oregon. After his first wife's death, he married Ada Chenoweth McCown (1886–1944), a political scientist who had earned a PhD from Columbia University in 1927 and was serving as a researcher in legislative reference at the Library of Congress just before their marriage in 1936.

Beatrice Aitchison attended private school for four years in Portland before the family moved to Washington, D.C., where she attended public schools. She graduated with honors from Central High School in Washington shortly before her sixteenth birthday. She reported in 1981, "I think that high school was very important to me . . . . I had two excellent instructors who were probably just out of college . . . and who were very excited about teaching" (Smithsonian meeting tapes). She then attended Goucher College 1924–28. After graduating from Goucher in 1928, she worked for a year in New York City for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company as its first female actuarial clerk. For eleven months in 1928–29 she took special courses while working in New York, and she passed the first four parts of the examinations of the American Institute of Actuaries and of the Actuarial Society of America in April 1929. Aitchison reported later that at just barely twenty she "couldn't cope with New York City," so she resumed her study of mathematics in October 1929 at Johns Hopkins University (Smithsonian meeting tapes). From 1929 until 1932 she was a University scholar at Johns Hopkins and earned a master's degree in 1931 and a PhD in 1933.

Since the Great Depression was in full force at the time of her doctorate, jobs were difficult to find. Aitchison recalled, "I applied to 145 colleges and universities my last spring at Hopkins . . . . Someone whom I didn't know but knew my background held my application thinking she might have an opening at Westhampton College [the college for women] at the University of Richmond. Sure enough, [one of the faculty members] got really sick and so on about three days notice I was down there teaching for one semester" (Smithsonian meeting tapes). After that semester as

acting associate professor, she served as lecturer in statistics at American University in Washington, D.C., 1934–35. She also wrote in her 1981 Smithsonian questionnaire that American University “invited [her] to ‘help’ with statistics for ‘experience’ and no pay.” She did, however, get credit for a graduate course in history of economic thought.

Aitchison’s mother died in the spring of 1935, and she returned to Oregon where she took a University of Oregon extension course in Portland in principles of economics. In 1936 she was a field supervisor for the Oregon Historical Records Survey of the WPA in Portland before spending the academic year 1936–37 at the University of Oregon. In 1937 she received her second master’s degree, this one with honors in economics. When she returned to Washington in 1937, she again lectured in statistics at American University, continuing to do so through 1938–39; she also served as a member of the faculty of the graduate school of the US Department of Agriculture. Starting in 1938 Aitchison held temporary assignments at the ICC and while in Washington she lived in her father’s house near Dupont Circle. She was one of thirty-five residents of the area interviewed in 1984 and 1985 for a master’s thesis, “Slices of the Pie: Black and White Dupont Circle from the 1920s to the 1950s” by Mara Cherkasky.

Aitchison returned to the University of Oregon as an economics instructor in 1939. She continued her temporary assignments with the ICC during the summers and prepared a report for its Bureau of Statistics that was published in 1941. At the beginning of 1942 Aitchison resigned her position in Oregon and began her long and distinguished career as a transportation economist with the US government. Her first position was with the ICC, where from 1942 to 1948 she advanced from junior to senior statistician, and from 1948 until 1951 she served as principal transportation economist. During her service with the ICC, Aitchison continued to teach as a lecturer in statistics at American University 1942–44. From 1942 until 1945, she was a consultant and head of traffic analysis for the Office of Defense Transportation, and in 1950 she was assigned from the ICC as a consultant to the director of military traffic of the Department of Defense. In 1946 Aitchison was a founding member of the American Society of Traffic and Transportation (now the American Society of Transportation and Logistics).

Aitchison left the ICC in 1951 and worked until 1953 as director of the Transport Economics Division of the Office of Transportation at the US Department of Commerce. After this post was abolished in 1953, she worked for the US Post Office until she retired in July 1971. Aitchison was director of transportation research 1953–58, director of transportation research and statistics 1958–67, and director of transportation rates and economics in her last position 1967–71. After her retirement she was self-employed as a consultant in transportation issues.

In the period from the mid-1940s to the 1970s, Aitchison conducted studies on transportation issues, testified before numerous regulatory agencies, and gave many talks on postal history and transportation at institutes and meetings of various transportation groups and postmasters’ conventions around the country. In addition to technical reports listed below, Aitchison wrote at least five others, two in the late 1950s and three in the early 1970s, that do not appear to be available in any library.

During and after her government career, Aitchison received many honors. Goucher presented her with an Alumnae Achievement Citation in 1954 and awarded her

an honorary DSc in 1979. In 1961 she was one of six career women in government chosen to receive the first annual Federal Woman's Award given by the Civil Service Commission. As a consequence of receiving this award, she was a member of the Federal Woman's Award Study Group on Careers for Women, a small group of award recipients who were asked by President Lyndon Johnson to make a study of careers for women. The group's recommendations resulted in an amendment to the executive order banning discrimination in government employment to include sex discrimination.

In receiving the Federal Woman's Award she was cited for her leadership in research and training in transportation economics and traffic management. It was noted that as a result of her work, "the postal service was able to realize millions of dollars in savings." Her obituary in the *Washington Post* reports that "in the 1960s, she supervised a five-year study leading to renegotiation of contracts with air carriers, saving the government an estimated \$50 billion a year."

In 1970 Aitchison was honored by the National Civil Service League with the Career Service Award as one of the top ten government workers of the year, the only woman in the group. She was named an Alumni Fellow of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oregon in 1996. The following year the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association honored her with a Woodrow Wilson Award for outstanding government service noting that she was one of the highest ranking women in the federal service at the time of her retirement.

In addition to consulting after her retirement, Aitchison spent significant time in volunteer work with the elderly. She received a certificate with honors for a paralegal training program for seniors at George Washington University's Institute of Law and Aging where she studied in 1977-78. In the early 1980s she indicated that she spent forty to fifty work days a year doing income taxes for the elderly with the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program.

Among her interests were music, photography, sewing, and traveling. The *Washington Post* obituary states that she had studied the mamba and the samba at Fred Astaire's dancing school and that "she also traveled widely, often by tramp steamer, to such locations as the South Pacific and Antarctica."

Beatrice Aitchison described her political affiliation as mainly independent. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, served on a hospital board, and was active in the Goucher Club of Washington, serving as treasurer and president. She also was a trustee of Goucher College 1969-72.

She was an active Episcopalian serving in a variety of positions. In 1963 she was the first woman elected to the vestry of Epiphany Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. She held many other positions in the church, including positions on the vestry of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., in the 1980s. Altogether she sang in church choirs from the time she was a young teen until about two years before her death.

She was very supportive of the schools where she had received her education. Summer grants for junior Goucher College faculty are available through the Beatrice Aitchison '28 Non-Tenured Faculty Professional Advancement Fund. Aitchison was also generous in her contributions to the Goucher library, allowing the librarian to select about eighty volumes from her personal library in 1963. In 1994 she established the Aitchison Public Service Fellowship, now called the Aitchison Public Service Undergraduate Fellowship in Washington, at Johns Hopkins.

Collections of her papers are deposited at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, and at the University of Oregon. Those at the Schlesinger Library deal with the period 1943–56 and contain articles and speeches by her as well as news releases concerning her appointment to the US Post Office. The more extensive collection at Oregon covers the period 1946–70 and includes records of the Civil Aeronautics Board, the Interstate Commerce Commission, and the Post Office Department, as well as speeches and addresses.

In 1997 Beatrice Aitchison died of congestive heart failure at eighty-nine at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, D.C. She left no immediate survivors.

**Organizational affiliations:** AMS, MAA, ASA (fellow), IMS, AAAS (fellow), Amer. Econ. Assoc., Amer. Soc. Traffic and Transportation, Econometric Soc., Transportation Assoc. Amer., Transportation Res. Forum, AAUW, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi.

**Theses and dissertation:**

**1931** Concerning regular accessibility. MA thesis, Johns Hopkins University, directed by Gordon Thomas Whyburn. Typescript. See also **1933** in **Publications**.

**1933** On mapping with functions of finite sections. PhD dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, directed by Gordon Thomas Whyburn. Typescript. Printed version, 1935, reprinted from *C. R. Soc. Sc. Varsovie* 27:130–46.

**1937** Mathematical characteristics of certain important scales of class-rates. MA thesis, University of Oregon.

**Publications:**

**1933** Concerning regular accessibility. *Fund. Math.* 20:117–25. Reviews: *JFM* 59.0574.02 (H. v. Caemmerer); *Zbl* 007.08205 (G. T. Whyburn). Presented by title to the AMS, Minneapolis, MN, 9 Sep 1931; abstract: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 37:527 #265.

**1935** On the mapping of locally connected continua into simple arcs. *C. R. Soc. Sc. Varsovie* 27:130–46. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 61.1369.02 (K. Borsuk); *Zbl* 012.12703 (G. T. Whyburn). Presented as “Concerning the mapping of locally connected continua onto simple arcs” to the AMS, Los Angeles, 2 Sep 1932; abstract: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 38:800 #231.

**1953** (Compiler and editor) with G. L. Wilson. Traffic and transportation flow analysis: papers and discussion, panel meeting, American Economics Association and American Statistics Association, Chicago sessions, Dec 1952.

**1969** Bureaucratic May Day or Cokes to Alaska and love letters to Viet Nam. *Goucher Quarterly* (Summer): 41–43.

**Selected technical reports:**

**1941** Preliminary examination of factors affecting the demand for rail passenger travel. Washington, DC: Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Statistics, Statement no. 4129, file 61–C–3. Microfilm: 1958. Berkeley: Univ. of California Photographic Service.

**1943a** A description of the principal class rate scales prescribed by the Interstate Commerce Commission: together with an analysis of their progression for distance, and a method of scale construction. Washington, DC: Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Transport Economics and Statistics, Statement no. 4351.

**1943b** [no author listed] Territorial movement of carload freight [traffic of steam railways] on May 27 and September 23, 1942. Washington, DC: Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Transport Economics and Statistics. Docket no. 28300. Class rate investigation.

**1946** Weight density and value as factors in freight classification. Washington, DC: Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Transport Economics and Statistics, Statement no. 469.

**1953** [no author listed] Charges for private use of federally provided transportation facilities and services: a staff study of the principles involved in federal user charges. Washington, DC: US Dept. of Commerce, Office of Transportation.

**1956** [no author listed] Report of the departmental committee on expedited first-class mail. Washington, DC: US Post Office Department. General research project no. 10. Editor and author of several chapters.

**1964** Productivity in purchase of transportation for mail, fiscal years 1953–1962. In “Case study of Post Office productivity. Report for the Bureau of the Budget.” Summary in “Measuring productivity of federal government organizations.” Washington, DC: US Bureau of the Budget. App. V–1, 234.

**Abstracts not listed above:**

**1932** Regular accessibility. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 39:509 #7. Presented to the MAA, College Park, MD, 7 May 1932.

**1933** On mapping with functions of finite sections. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 40:189–90 #1. Presented to the MAA, Baltimore, MD, 3 Dec 1932.

**Presentation not listed above:**

Elasticity of demand for rail passenger travel. Presented to a meeting of the Pacific Coast Econ. Assoc., Palo Alto, CA, 27–28 Dec 1940.

**References to:** AmMSc 6–8, 9S–11S; AmMWSc 12S–13S; AmWom 1935–40; InWom SUP; WhAm 13; WhoAmW 1–8, 10–17; WhoE 22; WhoGov 1; WhoWor 9–10.

“Army Calls 9,565 More Officers; Chaplains, Aviation Men Summoned.” *New York Times*, 19 Sep 1950.

“‘Queen Bea’ of Her Profession.” *Goucher Alumnae Quarterly*, Summer 1952, 16.

“Awards Go to Six as Career Women.” *New York Times*, 13 Feb 1961.

“She Keeps the Mails Moving.” *Washington Post*, 19 Feb 1961.

“6 Career Women in Government Get First Civil-Service Awards.” *New York Times*, 25 Feb 1961.

“10 Winners Named for Service Award.” *New York Times*, 22 Mar 1970.

“Waste-Watcher.” *Forbes*, 1 Jul 1970.

“Depression Era Alumna Recalls Lengthy Career.” *Casement*, Alumni Newsletter for the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Oregon, Spring 1995: 6.

Pearson, Richard. “Retired Postal Official Beatrice Aitchison Dies.” *Washington Post*, 29 Sep 1997.

**Related manuscript materials:**

Beatrice Aitchison Papers, 1943–1956. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Beatrice Aitchison Papers, 1946–1970. University of Oregon Libraries.

**Unpublished interview:**

Aitchison, Beatrice. Interview by Myra Cherkasky, 11 April 1984, Washington, DC. Oral History Project 10: Dupont Circle “Slices of the Pie,” Oral History Research Center, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, District of Columbia Public Library. Transcript.

**Other sources:** MA thesis vita 1931; PhD dissertation vita 1933; Owens questionnaire 1940; Smithsonian questionnaire 1981; Smithsonian meeting tapes 1981; Johns Hopkins University Archives; Society of Actuaries Library; Cockey, “Mathematics at Goucher”; NatCAB 47 (Aitchison, Clyde Bruce); WhAm 4 (Aitchison, Clyde Bruce); US Census 1910 OR, 1920, 1930 DC.

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