

## Memorial Minute for Mildred Campbell

1897-1991

Mildred Campbell first encountered the world of learning in a one-room schoolhouse near the farm in Sheffield, Tennessee, where, in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, she was born. Educated in Tennessee's Grandview Normal Institute and Maryville College, Mildred ventured North, first to receive her M.A. from Columbia and then to teach at Rockford College, Illinois. In 1929 Mildred left Rockford to enter Yale's Ph.d. program: a decision she probably soon questioned, for in her first weeks at Yale the bank in which she had deposited her precious savings crashed, leaving her penniless - - hardly an encouraging entry into an institution which presented challenges enough for a female student. Not that Mildred was discouraged for one moment: on entering Yale she immediately talked the distinguished Wallace Notestein into offering her an independent course and he quickly adopted her as his star pupil. An affable grittiness and an unassuming determination remained dominant characteristics throughout Mildred's life. Typically, she later wrote of her promotion to the tenured ranks at Vassar, "I knew what medieval land tenure was, but I wasn't sure that I knew what Vassar College tenure was. Another member of the department explained that tenure meant that I could never be fired. Well, I hadn't counted on being fired." She wasn't! And from 1932, when she joined the Vassar faculty, until her retirement in 1962, she was a major force in the History Department and on the campus at large.

In its long history, few of Vassar's faculty have attained so international a reputation as Mildred, but it was the rapport she achieved with generations of Vassar students that gave Mildred her greatest satisfaction. Her special creation and crowning achievement was History 150, the introductory history of England. Despite the historian's commitment to reinterpreting the past and incorporating new perspectives, her basic framework and nucleus of sources live on in our curriculum today. In her course Mildred lovingly introduced students to the historian's craft, including research, which she called "rabbit chasing". They analyzed the Bayeux Tapestry for its unconscious testimony on early feudalism, listened to folk ballads to capture popular sentiments on the Stuarts, looked at early rationalism in Tudor gardens, and read everything from diaries of seventeenth-century women to parliamentary debates. Long before the popularity of studies in gender and class, Mildred Campbell was doing it all, and in a course for Freshmen. Fittingly for one who once played Peter Pan on stage and Lulubelle Flitfield in the Founder's Day Faculty Show, Mildred presented her panoply of sources with great dramatic verve.

As much as her innovative methodology, it was her sensitivity towards students which made Mildred such a beloved teacher. She had kept a diary of her freshman year at Maryville College, and she read it every year to remind herself what it was like to be a nervous yet eager student of 17 or so. Her written comments on papers served to bond teacher and student in the common enterprise of research. A freshman might read in the margin of her paper, "I found this same thing in my work", or "You are discovering the joys of research", or, the ultimate accolade, "You will love graduate school". She encouraged generations of

Vassar undergraduates to define themselves against and through other selves in time and conveyed, never didactically or pedantically, the essential idea that a liberal arts education was a liberating, transforming force that enabled Vassar graduates to lead principled, active lives. She remained awed to the end by the challenge of teaching, reassuring a nervous younger colleague by her remark, as she began her last semester, "I've still got butterflies."

The honours heaped on Mildred were legion - - among them honorary degrees from Rockford and Maryville colleges, Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships, the Presidency of the Berkshire Conference, the Achievement Award from the American Association of University Women; she was a Fellow at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and of the Royal Historical Society: she served on the editorial boards of several leading scholarly journals, and on the boards of the Williamsburg Institute and the Folger Library; and she was elected to the Council of the American Historical Association in 1959 when that body was notoriously a bastion of male privilege.

As a scholar Mildred was prolific, and her later publications on English emigration to Colonial America excited enormous interest, but it was her "classic", The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts, published in 1942, that brought her, and so Vassar, lasting fame here and abroad. It was a pioneering work which prefigured "history from below". Mildred wrote that Clio, the muse of History, could be found in remote fishing villages, . . . [in] the diary of an obscure country vicar or the papers of an unknown sea captain." And she evoked the lives of the hitherto obscure yeomen with such verve that one could easily forget that she was also a pioneer of quantitative techniques- - for the one county of

Worcestershire alone she analyzed the status of some 14,000 families in order to uncover more of her yeomen. But, while she industriously scoured local archives, all the while hauling her heavy old Yale camera for photographing manuscripts, she could also take time to admire the sunsets in Norfolk, the fog swirling around the British Museum, or "primroses on the banks of Devon lanes in the spring."

In the dark days of 1942, as she was putting the finishing touches to her book in her beloved home of Yonder Hills, in Grandview, Tennessee, Mildred stirringly wrote that her English yeomen's "love of freedom . . . [and] sense of the dignity of the individual" constituted "a scale of values that took deep root and flourished in the New World in a soil that was to its liking." This, in turn, constituted Mildred's "grand view" of the roots of the American way of life. Mildred personified the spirit and values of the English yeoman, independent, unostentatious, stout-willed, common-sensical, upright, and neighbourly. She had honesty, which, in Elizabethan England, she wrote, "meant not so much truthfulness as simplicity, genuineness, and lack of display" - - "homespun" in manner and speech, characteristics which, perhaps, owed as much to her proud Scottish and Tennessee heritage as to her English yeomen.

On 19 February, 1991, Mildred Campbell died at the age of 93 in the house on College Avenue she loved so much. For half a century she had shared a home with Evalyn Clark, Professor Emeritus of History, a home which, it is no exaggeration to say, served as a place of pilgrimage for generations of alumnae. Mildred once provocatively and mischievously described Poughkeepsie as the "ideal center" for her retirement, situated

as it was between the Yale and New York Public libraries! She brought to that "center" her own special light, her own unique animation, and her own distinctive blend of wisdom, warmth, and wit. We admired her, we loved her, we miss her.

Respectfully submitted,

Evalyn Clark

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with appreciation to:

Mary Keeler

Donald Olsen