

LUCY ELIZABETH TEXTOR

1870 - 1958

Lucy Elizabeth Textor, professor emerita of history at Vassar College, died at Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, on June 29, 1958 in her eighty-eighth year. Upon this occasion Vassar College pays tribute to a loyal friend and to a teacher who served for thirty-six years as an active member of its faculty, and to a historian who, with the encouragement of Lucy Maynard Salmon, then chairman of the Department of History, was responsible for the development of Russian, eastern European, and Far Eastern history at the college in the early years of this century when such studies in the United States were mainly limited to a few large universities.

Miss Textor was the daughter of Joseph Conrad and Elizabeth Kuhn Textor. Though born in West Virginia, she spent most of her early life in Chicago and took her first degree of Bachelor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan. Her interest in history and in teaching, awakened at Michigan, led her to Stanford University where she was awarded the Master's Degree in American history. In odd contrast to the field to which she later devoted herself her thesis, which, unlike most master's dissertations, was published, dealt with the relations between the United States government and the Sioux Indians.

By teaching in a private school in Palo Alto and later in a high school in New Haven, Connecticut, Miss Textor supported herself while she earned her Ph.D. degree at Yale University. Immediately thereafter she came as an instructor to Vassar College in 1905.

A few years ago, long after she had retired, on the occasion of a visit to Vassar Miss Textor told her younger colleagues in the history department of Miss Salmon's encouragement of her ambition to specialize in Russian history and how the older woman insisted on her getting field experience at the earliest opportunity. Traveling in Russia alone in 1909 and again in 1911 was an adventurous step for a young American woman. She traveled widely in Russia and much to her surprise and delight found herself the object of hospitality from many Russian families who generously felt that they must instruct, protect, and entertain this young western student of their country. From that day on Miss Textor became a warm-hearted friend of the Slavic peoples and an interpreter of their culture to her students and to the public.

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After the First World War Miss Textor's special interests turned to Czechoslovakia, then newly independent. She spent a sabbatical year in that country and published, in London in 1923, a book on Agrarian Reform in Czechoslovakia. In 1928 a number of American educators, including John Dewey, were invited by the Commissar of Education, Lunarchorsky, to visit the Russian schools. At that time many people in this country were still hopeful that something good would result from the great Russian experiment. In her talks after her return, Miss Textor reflected this hope, though she was without illusions about the totalitarian and ruthless character of the regime. A longer stay in Russia of over eight months in 1930-31 gave her a closer view. She lived not as a tourist but as the Russians did (in her case with a fourth class food card which only entitled her to a small amount of black bread, dried fish, and tea and sugar upon occasion). She taught English to help support herself. She attended one of the earliest purge trials and saw some of the worst sufferings of the period of forced liquidation of the kulaks and returned highly critical of the Stalinist regime.

At Vassar Miss Textor's studies led to the organization of new courses, especially to a senior course in the history of Central and Eastern Europe. She also gave a course from time to time in Far Eastern History in which she did not claim to be a specialist, but to which her interest in Russian Eastern expansion naturally attracted her. She was much in demand as a lecturer to women's organizations and to other groups in the mid-Hudson valley and as far away as Detroit and Chicago.

Many present members of the Vassar faculty remember Miss Textor in the later years of her career as a stately but outgoing and warm-hearted woman, friendly to newcomers. She supported ardently the development of the infant Russian Department, which grew to regular status during the 1930's. In those years of Hitlerite expansion Miss Textor was most active in arousing American sympathy for the Czechs and later for the Poles in their suffering under Nazi domination. Her generosity, in the spending of self and substance, knew no bounds. There were many opportunities for her to help refugees from Russia as well as from Poland and Czechoslovakia with friendly hospitality, wise counsel and financial aid. She was able to repay

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hospitality granted her in earlier days by helping to resettle in Canada the surviving members of a Russian family. Several scholars from Czechoslovakia were introduced to academic circles in this country through her efforts, and as a result, were able to establish themselves in suitable positions.

After her own retirement, Miss Textor's sympathies and energies were largely occupied for some years by the protracted invalidism of her dear friend, Miss Florence White, Emeritus Professor of French. Miss Textor devoted herself whole-heartedly to Miss White, not only doing much actual nursing, but providing an atmosphere of serenity and cheerful hospitality. Later, in spite of failing eyesight and the infirmities of advancing years, she continued to demonstrate courage, wit, and good spirits.

Now, after the close of this long life of active service to scholarship, to generations of students, to her country, and to the cause of international good will, we salute Lucy Elizabeth Textor to whom Vassar College owes enduring honor, gratitude and affection

Charles C. Griffin
Ruth E. Conklin