

May 10,  
1989

Memorial Minute **for** Elizabeth M. Drouilhet

Elizabeth Moffat Drouilhet served Vassar College as Warden and Dean of Residence from 1940 until her retirement in 1976. Those bare facts do not begin to capture the impact **that** she had on this institution. For generations of students and faculty, Betty Drouilhet the "Drou" as she was always called with both affection and awe --- embodied and personified Vassar College.

She possessed in large measure those qualities which the members of this community, at their best, seem to **strive for**

**courage**, a firm set of principles and a commitment to fairness, an enormous capacity for growth and change, an engaging sense of humor, and a boundless love for people and for this institution.

Betty was born in Ardmore, Pennsylvania on March 29, 1909; she first came to Poughkeepsie as a Vassar student in 1926. In 1941, she told the Miscellany News that she had been a Political Science major and History minor who started with **B's** and C's but who achieved five A's in her senior year (a cautionary tale for **the** benefit **of** students **if** we ever heard one). She was active on the Debate team for **two** years, **was** captain of the Field Hockey team for three, played baseball and went out **for** track, and, not surprisingly, served as the sports reporter for the Miscellany News for two years. In addition, she had what **was** then called a self- help job in the Post Office and was the manager of the book and furniture exchange. One can almost see in this record of extracurricular activity a peculiar degree of foresight, since much of her later job involved supporting the students in their various activities outside the classroom.

After graduation from Vassar in 1930, Betty returned to the Philadelphia area, and began graduate training in the Social Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania on a fellowship. She married a young naval officer in February **1931**. Her only child, a son, Paul, was born in 1933, and shortly thereafter Betty returned from **the** West

Coast via the Panama Canal, again to the Philadelphia area. She became Head of the Social Sciences department at Harcum Junior College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania in 1935, and subsequently served as registrar, vocational adviser, and Assistant to the President at **Harcum** until 1940. In 1940, Eleanor Dodge, the Warden of Vassar, took a leave of absence for one year and Betty Drouilhet was her personal choice, seconded strongly by President **Mac** Cracken, to be her substitute. When Miss Dodge decided not to return to Vassar, Betty was named Warden, which the news release at the time called a "position comparable to that of Dean of Women at other colleges." That may be what they thought, but for generations of Vassar students (and not a few faculty), Betty Drouilhet was the College.

Until Jack Duggan arrived in the fall of 1969 to be the first Vice-President for Student Affairs, Betty was the final authority on all matters of rooming, extracurricular activities, student discipline, and other non-academic matters. She ran the College commencements and convocations with an iron hand and a strong sense of what was proper. Even faculty were told that Navy Blue and Black were the only appropriate colors to be worn under an academic gown, and Betty had the authority, personal as well as delegated, to exclude one from the line of march for improper attire. It is probably not beside the point that Betty had, as a freshman, been so impressed by her initial exposure to fall convocation that she wrote a paper on the history of academic regalia. That knowledge continued to serve her in good stead. She put together the inaugurations of Sarah Blanding and Alan Simpson while she was Dean, and that of Virginia Smith after she retired. Betty's authority extended to other areas as well. When Alan Simpson stoutly resisted being sidelined by a mild heart attack, Betty was the only person who could keep him from overtaxing himself. After a suitable interval at a college event, she would take him gently by the hand and lead him away, announcing that he had been there long enough. No one else could keep him in check.

While Betty's special province was the extracurricular life of students, she never for one moment forgot that the primary mission of the college was an academic one. She worked closely with the Dean of the College and later with Deans of Studies and Deans of Freshmen to ensure that the needs of individual students were being met without compromising the integrity of the community. In the late 1940's, she somehow found the time (energy never seemed to be a problem) to earn her Master's degree at Vassar in Psychology. While she sometimes took a dim view of the Mellon Studies of the 1950's, she strongly supported a good counseling service long before others knew what help such resources could offer. She

was a backbone **to** the House Fellows and was always **ready** to help them carry out their sometimes difficult **task** of being **the** adult presence in the dormitory.

A summons to see "The Drou" (or simply the necessity to make an **appointment** to ask for something) could fill a student (or faculty member) with a mild degree of terror. She had, to say the least, a brusque exterior, one that was well-communicated in her typical way **of** answering the telephone "YEEESS?". **You had** to steel yourself to encounter **that** yes, even if you were returning her call. But behind that exterior lurked the proverbial warm heart and a marvelous sense of humor. She was full of common sense, **was** reluctant to be conned by students **or** faculty, but finally she **was** someone who believed in others and would give them a chance if they gave her **half** an opportunity. She loved to tell



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the **story** of the time in the early 1960's when a group of students came to her office to ask permission to picket Woolworth's downtown. She was bemused by the irony of a request **for** permission to picket. After she disabused the students of the notion that permission was required, she had them return instead for a short course in appropriate tactics for non-violent demonstrations!

Those of us writing **this** memorial knew Betty best in the last 20-25 years of her life, years that were in some ways more **tumultuous** than those that had preceded them. She managed to cope with the Davison fire in the winter of 1959, rehousing students overnight and supervising the rehabilitation of the dormitory. She greeted Alan Simpson's overtures to **Yale** in **1966** with all of the **enthusiasm** you could expect from a loyal alumna, but she was a model of the circumspection one expects from a professional administrator. None of us knew until her final convocation speech in 1976 exactly what the nature of her own thinking had been. She **strongly** supported the move to make Vassar a coeducational college when the **data** convinced her that the best women were no longer attracted to a woman's 'college. Betty could never have said, "My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts." She let facts speak for themselves and used them to make up her mind. While others made the final decision, Betty had the task of housing the first men at Vassar which was not easy considering that there were only about 70 men on the **first** exchange program, and almost all of the dormitories wanted their **fair** share. She **also had** the unenviable task of explaining, **over** and over again, to horrified alumnae and parents that the **bathrooms** would not be **coeducational** even if the dormitories were. **advent** of men brought an increase in the size of the College and the consequent necessity to increase the number of student beds available. Betty's strong belief in the importance of single rooms for students led her to advocate and then superintend the building of the **Town** Houses and Terrace Apartments. She also played a major role in the planning of the College Center as the new home for the student activities that had been displaced by the conversion of Student's Building into the All-Campus Dining Center.

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When parietal regulations became an issue, Betty was firm in siding with students that there should be no double standard **for** women and men. In 1969, she was named as a defendant in a **law** suit against the College brought by the parents of **a** student who objected to the College's allowing the Student Government Association to establish unrestricted visiting hours between the sexes. **That** case, which **the** College won, is included in a casebook of legal issues for college administrators. A second case the following year was settled out of **court**. A student brought suit **against** the College, naming Betty among other defendants, alleging that the College's failure to improve her rooming situation led directly to her academic failure. In her deposition, the student stated that her

roommate's marijuana use had become an increasing problem over the course of the semester and **that** when she went to Betty complaining of the smoke and asking for a room change, Betty suggested that she "open the windows." None of **us** who **were** named as codefendants **would** have **wanted** to bet the rent **on** whether Betty **said** that **or** not.

After she retired, Betty continued to live in the house on Raymond Avenue which she had **built in** the **1960's** and which **she** shared with Leila Barber of the Art Department. They traveled **regularly** each summer to England and entertained old friends through the year. Betty continued to **work** in her garden and developed increasing talent as **a** photographer, taking great pleasure in developing and printing her own pictures. After Leila's **death**, Betty's health began to **fail**. She was reluctant to sell her house and leave Poughkeepsie, but decided that it made sense to **move** nearer to her son and **his** family in Massachusetts. She moved to a retirement home in Concord on Labor Day, 1987, and died there on December **6** of that year.

Betty Drouilhet was one of the **great** ladies of the old school who gave everything to the College and expected **little** in return. We miss her.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Constantinople

Mary-Alice Hunter

Mary Alice Hunter

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M. Glen Johnson

Natalie Marshall Marshall

**Natalie Marshall**