

Oct. 16,
1991

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 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**.

hardly an encouraging entry **into** an

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

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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**, **commonsensical**, 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.

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Respectfully submitted,

Evalyn Clark

Clyde Griffen

Joan Kennedy Kinnaird

Anthony S. Wohl

with appreciation to:

Mary Keeler

Donald Olsen