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
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.
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
Alle Jahan
M. Glen Johnson

Natalie Marshall Marshall
Natalie Marshall