

AVE ATQUE VALE

E. Adelaide Hahn

April 1, 1893 - July 8, 1967

She was a legend in her time--and quite unaware of it.

About a decade after she had started teaching at Hunter undergraduates began talking with awe of a member of the Classics Department, whom everyone called "E. Adelaide", even if they had never seen or met her. She was the Scholar Par Excellence. She was the font of all classical knowledge. She was a glory of Hunter.

What most did not know was the non-academic Adelaide. She was vital, she was fun; she was naive and sophistication combined. She had a quick and brilliant mind. She did not "suffer fools gladly". She was almost as proud of her ability to tell you instantaneously the number of letters in any polysyllabic word you uttered as she was of her many linguistic publications. She doted on Gilbert and Sullivan and regretted her lack of interest in "good" music. She adored the theatre, particularly when she was behind the footlights; a touch of greasepaint converted her into the hammiest and happiest of amateur actors. She was a gourmand; food was necessary to stoke the body which served her. She read and reread romances by Angela Thirkell, Mazo de la Roche and Georgette Heyer.

Her love of Hunter was congenital. Her mother, Eleonore Funk Hahn '75, tutored this only child at home until a year before she was to enter high school, at which time Adelaide was taken to Hunter Model School. She was proud that her education was all Hunter. And it was all A's, too, except for a speech course B, for which she made all later Speech Department colleagues feel guilty. Her major at first was mathematics but she switched to classics and made an international reputation in linguistics.

Naturally, she was active in the Alumnae Association. When in 1958 she became president of the Alumni Association, she reluctantly relinquished editorship of the NEWS, to which she had acceded in 1944 at the death of her mother.

Retirement from teaching was compulsory because of age in 1963. Friends wondered, as did Adelaide, how she would manage without daily visits to Hunter, which had been an intimate part of her life for over fifty years and to whose functioning she had been privy for so long. Adelaide was always ready to do battle for Hunter, her Alma Mater whose unsullied reputation had to remain pristine.

She was a civil libertarian, with a militant interest in fair play. She had the courage to face down anyone in arguing support of what she considered right and proper.

She was a "character", knew it and relished being so. What if she had never acquired even a basic knowledge of simple household duties? She was a feminist. Someone could always be found to clean, cook and wash what was needed in her academic ivory tower. From that tower she could and did see what was going on in the world--when she wanted to.

The Monday after Adelaide's death (the cause of which was cancer and she would not have shied away from saying so had she known) President Gambrell directed that flags on both campuses of Hunter College be flown at half-staff. The college to which she had brought so much honor was proud in its sorrow to honor its distinguished alumna, Professor Emeritus E. Adelaide Hahn, Class of June 1915.

The source of the legend has died but the legend lives on.