

THE ALUMNÆ NEWS

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Eleonore F. Hahn

July 4, 1857—July 25, 1944

Editor of Alumnae News

November 1913—June 1944

Meeting Mrs. Hahn was among the delightful surprises attendant upon coming to Hunter. While I had seen her previously, and of course heard a good deal about her, nothing had quite prepared me for the brilliance of her mind. She had what the older writers called "wit" as well as what in our keener modern air is designated by the same term. That is, her mind was extraordinarily curious and retentive, but none of the load of wisdom she acquired lessened the elasticity of her intelligence. At repartee she was so good that I was often reminded of some uncannily skillful baseball pitcher. One never quite knew whether her next remark would come to the point in a flash, or whether

it would skip across the corner of the conversational plate at some inexplicable oblique angle. But what was truly remarkable was that these gifts were found in a person wholly free of any trace of malice. She really loved human beings, believed in them, cherished their causes. And so her loyalty to Hunter, which was unflagging, was merely part of her larger loyalty to the good life. This she seemed to define as conduct illuminated by reason. She was of the old, staunch breed of the reasonable people, which seems, alas, to be dying out. Hunter will miss her sorely. But we shall all of us be a little the better for having had the pleasure of her company.

GEORGE N. SHUSTER.

ELEONORE FUNK HAHN

By HER DAUGHTER

(Written at the request of the President of the Associate Alumnae)

Eleonore Funk—like George M. Cohan, as he used to sing, and like Calvin Coolidge—was “born on the Fourth of July”. When she was a little girl, she believed her Irish nurse, who told her the celebration was in her honor; and she was always very proud of her birthday.

She was born, one of four daughters, in 1857. Her birthplace was Detroit; but when she was two years old, the family moved to the metropolis that was to be her home for the rest of her life. That was the New York of horse-cars and gas-lights and brown-stone high-stoop private houses. She could remember the draft riots of the Civil War as well as the blizzard of '88; but she never lived in the past, always in the present and the future.

She resided in St. Mark's Place, and she played in Tompkins Square Park, and she went to Fourteenth Street School. In 1872 she entered the Normal College, still at Fourth Street and Broadway; and so she was one of the first group of students to occupy the dear Old Building on Sixty-eighth Street and Park Avenue which was the New Building in 1873. She graduated in 1875, with such illustrious fellow-graduates as Betsey B. Davis and Marguerite Merington, and with “Kitty” Blake and “Nelly” Cone coming along in the following year.

Like all his old girls, she of course revered President Hunter, and frequently quoted him. She often told me of how when visiting her geometry class he commended her demonstration of a theorem with a hearty “Well done”; and of how on another occasion, coming into her class-room, he commented on the hand-writing in which she, as class secretary, had inscribed the day's attendance on the board. (Many alumnae will remember her beautiful penmanship, remarkable for its grace and character and clearness as well as for the ease and speed with which it was produced.) Among the faculty, her great love was Professor Day; and she treasured a physiology text-book by Thomas Huxley that he gave her. She enjoyed relating how he invited her to dinner at his house, assuring her mother beforehand that the young lady would be duly escorted home; and how on meeting his son, an attractive young gentleman of about her own age, she was in anguish for fear this contemporary and not the adored professor would be the escort, but her anxiety proved happily groundless.

She was an honor student at College. I cherish the sets of books that she won each year as an undergraduate for standing first in her class, and the Kelly Medal for “Methods of Teaching” inscribed “Ellie Funk, 1875”. The Kelly Medal was awarded on the basis of the regular examination in pedagogy that all the students took. With a curi-

ous distrust of her own powers that always characterized her, despite all her successes and—in her later years—all my scoldings, she never thought of entering the special prize examinations in other subjects. It was only when it was too late that she learned how confident various professors had been of her winning, and how disappointed they were to find that she had not tried. The same diffidence kept her from accepting a probationary instructorship at Normal College offered her on her graduation, since she feared she would not give satisfaction; instead she went into the city public school system.

The test that brought her the Kelly Medal was marked by a group of outside examiners. One of these, Salome Purroy, was so much impressed by the qualities of her paper that she asked for Miss Funk's assignment to P. S. 53, the school of which she was principal. This was the beginning of a close friendship that ended only with Miss Purroy's death almost a quarter-century later. I still have in my possession the books she gave me—bound volumes of *St. Nicholas* and others—that had been the childhood property of her distinguished nephew, John Purroy Mitchel; and if I had not been named Adelaide I would have been named Salome. Years later, long after Miss Purroy's death, the school that she had headed was named the Salome Purroy School in her honor; the name was bestowed at exercises attended by Mayor Mitchel, and the newspapers gave considerable space to reporting the speech that my mother made on that occasion, in which she included some reminiscences of the Mayor's childhood, telling among other things how she as a young teacher entertained him when he visited the school by letting him dip his baby fist in all the ink-wells.

She was a remarkable teacher—strict in discipline and exacting in standards, but (or perhaps therefore) adored by her pupils, who regarded “staying in after school” as a privilege and not a penalty, and who eagerly aspired to the reward offered the ten best girls each month of being invited to spend a Saturday afternoon at her home (when they usually disturbed the family routine by their inability to leave at the proper time). To this day when I meet her “old girls” they bear loving testimony to the permanent impress which she made upon their minds and characters.

As was obligatory in those days, her teaching career ended with her marriage. Nor, once I had put in my appearance, would she have wished it otherwise; for, ardent feminist though she always was, she did not believe that a woman could or should combine a career outside the home with the responsibilities of motherhood. Till I was in my teens, I was her sole concern; and once when she did go to a New Year's Eve party with my father, the family seamstress was called in to spend the night in order that she might help the two maids take care of me.

She taught me at home till I was ready for

high school, sending me first, however, to the Hunter College Elementary School—old "T. D. N. C."—for a year in order to get me used to class-room ways. Many wondered whether I could make progress without the spur of competition; but her brilliant teaching was ample stimulation. Her great concern was to teach me to *think*; for this reason she never hurried or worried me with time-limits, and therefore sometimes feared that I might be handicapped by school-room requirements of finishing a given task, such as a composition or an examination, within a specified period; but this did not prove to be the case. I am sure I owe any success that I may have subsequently reached to the soundness of the training that I received from her. Under her guidance, I wrote compositions and memorized poems, I analyzed sentences and solved problems; and to the solid foundations laid by her I attribute the love for language and literature that determined my specialization, and the interest in mathematics that I regret never being able to develop. She herself hoped I would major in mathematics at College, and I think was at first a little disappointed—though later well content—that at the last minute I changed my mind and chose the classics instead. That she did not press me was typical of her; I cannot remember that she ever compelled me, or even unduly coaxed me, to do anything against my will. She took great pride and interest in my work at Hunter High School and College, and was delighted at any success that came my way; but she never led me to feel that any failure to achieve was reprehensible, and indeed she always promised that if my report-card did not show all A's she would give me a nice present to comfort me.

Her theory in bringing me up was to make and keep me healthy and happy. Far in advance of her time she aimed to give me what to-day would be called "security". An eminent child psychologist was much impressed when told of the code by which I was reared, and asked for a copy of the four promises that my mother always made to me: that none of my possessions would ever be taken away from me; that I would never be struck unless I struck some one else first; that I would never be punished for an accident; that I would never be punished for telling the truth.

As I have said, all through my childhood and early girlhood, she devoted herself almost exclusively to me. Her one outside interest was the cause of woman suffrage. In regard to this she saw the community attitude gradually change from early derision and aversion to final sympathy and acceptance. She marched in every single suffrage parade, though she would not let me participate until my college days, when she was sure I was old enough to make up my mind for myself. She was leader of our district for the old Woman Suffrage Party, which once the vote was won became the League of

Women Voters (of which she was a charter member); and she worked very hard for the cause, even conducting street meetings though these were distasteful to her, and indeed one of them nearly made martyrs of us both, when the policeman who was supposed to protect us deserted us, and we were pelted with sticks and stones by hoodlums until a neighbor's young son, a contemporary and childhood swain of mine, nobly came to our rescue.

Once we had the vote, she of course never failed to exercise it, at primary or regular election. She was an enrolled Republican; but in national politics she supported the New Deal, because of what seemed to her its humanitarianism and sympathies for the under-privileged. This last summer, she listened with great interest to the broadcasts of the two Chicago Conventions, hearing the Democratic one from her sick-bed; she had hoped for Mr. Wallace's nomination because she thought the President favored him, but she was pleased with Mr. Truman's because he supported the Equal Rights Amendment, of which she was an ardent advocate, and for which she had helped gain the endorsement of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

I think it was when I was in my last year in high school that she joined her first women's clubs: the Woman's Forum, of which she was later to be a Director, and the Society for Political Study, of which she was later to be first Treasurer and then President. At the time of her death she belonged to twenty women's clubs, mainly civic, educational, and philanthropic, in many of which she had held offices or chairmanships; notably she had served as President of the Rainy Day Club of America from 1933 until 1940, and thereafter as Honorary President; she was inducted as First Vice-President of the Woman's Press Club less than two months before she died; and, fittingly (for she was herself a great home-maker, in the fullest sense of the word), she was President of the Home Makers Forum from 1932 until the time of her death. It was in connection with the work of this club that she carefully studied, and then earnestly espoused, the cause of removing taxes from margarine; she was actuated by her never-failing desire to help the under-privileged, for whom, as she often said, the choice was not between margarine and butter but between margarine and no spread at all.

Her active participation in the affairs of the Alumnae dates from about the same time as her entrance into women's clubs. It was just a little later—in 1913—that Mrs. Kramer invited her to become Editor of the ALUMNAE NEWS. With that strange tendency to underrate her own abilities of which I spoke before, she hesitated to accept; but I was on hand now to try to bring her to a more just self-appreciation, and I bullied her into accepting. In going through some old papers since her death, I found a letter dated October 13, 1913, from her sister Ad-

die—my godmother—which said, "Of course you think that you are not competent to be editor of the ALUMNAE NEWS, but I dare say that the persons who chose you have *some* judgment." Personally, I think they had! When she had served as Editor for fifteen years, the Alumnae surprised and delighted her with the gift of a beautiful diamond and platinum wrist-watch, which ever after was one of her most prized possessions. In a charming little speech of thanks which she made extemporaneously, she indicated that she was not planning to rest on her laurels, but would go right on working—as indeed she did for more than another fifteen years. Her work for the NEWS was indeed a labor of love; many a night she was up to the wee sma' hours reading proof, and it was often two or three in the morning when I crammed her bulky packet down our mail chute. She also served the Alumnae as Vice-President, as Director, as Parliamentarian, and as a member of many committees.

She was also extremely active in the three great Federations of Women's Clubs, City, State, and General. In the City Federation she had held a number of offices up to the First Vice-Presidency, and many Chairmanships, especially that of the Department of Education, which she headed under many administrations; her years of service had won her an Honorary Chairmanship as early as 1929, but she was always ready and eager for active service as well. In the State, too, she had been Chairman of Education as well as Editor of the magazine, the *New York State Clubwoman*, for four years, and Director; at the time of her death she was Chairman of Resolutions, and had just prepared a digest of all resolutions passed by the Federation throughout its half-century of existence, in preparation for its coming Golden Jubilee. In the General Federation, she had been Chairman of the Division of Public Instruction under three successive administrations (though ordinarily third terms are unheard-of in this body), from 1926 to 1932; and she was a member of the Historical Committee, which gave her a place on the Board, under both the previous administration and the present one. As Chairman of Public Instruction, she had advocated sabbatical leaves for all teachers, deans of girls in all high schools attended by girls, Federal Aid for education, and the adoption of the metric system of weights and measures; the pamphlets which she published in support of these movements attracted much favorable comment. She was well-known to the clubwomen of the country, and the *General Federation Clubwoman* for September calls her "one of the most unique, unusual and beloved women of the General Federation", and says, "a federation meeting will never be the same without her".

She hardly ever missed a convention of any of the three Federations, or of the Conference on the Cause and Cure of War, or of the Herald Tribune Forum. When she

went to a convention, she attended every session; other women got tired and took "time out", but she was always on hand from beginning to end, one of the first to come and the last to go. She had already engaged a room at the Waldorf for the Board Meeting of the General Federation and the Herald Tribune Forum, to be held there successively in October 1944. Her attendance at the meetings of the Conference on the Cause and Cure of War throughout its entire existence testifies to her interest in peace and internationalism, as does also her membership in the League of Nations Association and Freedom House; she was an ardent supporter of the League of Nations and of the World Court, and was hoping and working for some form of international coöperation to follow the present war, in this connection serving as Chairman of her Congressional District in the newly organized United Nations Association.

Reference has already been made to her two great crusades, the one appealing essentially to her sympathies and the other primarily to her reason—for margarine and the metric system. She was known throughout the country for her campaigns for both of these. When the General Federation at its Convention at St. Louis in April of this year passed a resolution favoring the adoption of the metric system, for which she had led the debate, she called it the great moment of her life. Another cause very close to her heart was that of Townsend Harris High School, for whose preservation she worked indefatigably up to the very last; a moving letter from the Executive Secretary of the City College Alumni says in this connection, "One of the most touching experiences of my life is the picture of the great lady taking over the microphone at our final commencement in June, 1942, and calling out to boys, teachers, parents who were only a fraction of her age, but who were sunk in gloom, words of courage, unyielding optimism, and hope."

Another great interest of hers was Chautauqua. We made our first visit to this unique resort in 1937, when she was invited there as a speaker; we immediately became confirmed Chautauquans, returning there every summer. It was on the occasion of our first visit there that we both entered what a Buffalo paper termed "the most colorful" spelling-match held there in years. She was the audience's favorite from the first, because she spelled so clearly and unfalteringly that all the thousands in the enormous Amphitheater heard her with ease. When all the forty-eight original contestants had been eliminated except us two, and the audience learned a mother and daughter were trying to spell each other down, and especially when with her usual gay spirits she ceremoniously shook hands with me before we entered our final ordeal, the huge assembly went wild with delight, which I am sure was increased when I finally missed. I can still hear the shocked and pained tone with which she

cried, "Why, Adelaide," the moment I made my mistake. Everybody, including myself, was glad she was the victor; some people thought I let her win, but of course I didn't; that would have spoiled all the fun for both of us. She believed in doing her best always, and she brought me up to do the same.

Within the space of a year, she won four first prizes: \$10.00 in the spelling-match (I got \$5.00); a subscription for the following year's *Chautauquan Daily*, for writing the best commentary on the issues of that year; a waffle-iron in a Woman's Hobby Show cake-baking contest; and an exquisite vase for doing the most to promote a "Sales Week" at Arnold Constable's in behalf of a favorite charity, the New York City Federation Hotel for Working Girls. It seems to me that the variety of the fields in which she gained these distinctions—academic, literary, culinary, and philanthropic—bears testimony to the breadth of her interests and the versatility of her talents.

Her love for humanity was boundless. When she read a newspaper announcement of an engagement or a marriage, she was always pleased if both parents of both parties were reported as living. Even in the sufferings of her last week, she kept her tender unselfishness. On Saturday evening (she died the next Tuesday morning) she seemed so much worse that I summoned the doctor posthaste. When I fretted at his delay in arriving, she said in a voice so weak I had to bend over her to catch the words, "I can wait; perhaps he is with some patient who needs him more than I."

In a quiet way, she had abundant courage and the ability to meet emergencies. She saved both our lives in the summer when I was twelve years old, which we spent at Sea Isle City on the Jersey Coast. One day while in bathing we were caught in a deep and dangerous hole. No one was on hand to come to our rescue, I was not yet able to swim, so everything depended on her. I can still hear the reassuringly calm and firm tone in which she said as we suddenly—first I and then she—found ourselves beyond our depth, "Just stay quiet, Adelaide, and *be sure not to clutch me.*" She was not at all a powerful swimmer, and there was a terrific undertow which was sweeping us out to sea; but holding me with one arm she resolutely swam against the current until at last our feet once more touched the welcome sand. She often said afterwards that she thought special strength must have been given her to meet that deadly peril.

Another of her salient characteristics was the quick responsiveness of her mind, combined with rare facility of expression. Possessed of a rich flow of language, she wrote and spoke easily and effectively; many alumnae will recall her editorials, some grave and some gay, in which she could say so much in a few words, and also the charming original rhymes that she sent to her friends every year as Christmas greetings; and orally, with

complete freedom from self-consciousness, she could always extemporize either in prose or in verse. The lightning-like swiftness and brilliance of her wit, and the buoyant gaiety of her humor, can only be remembered, not illustrated; for her living sparkling personality is needed to convey their quality.

All her life she was busy and active and useful; and she often said she wanted to live as long as she could continue so, but no longer. She dreaded the infirmities of old age, which she was miraculously spared; when any one commented on her advanced years, as people sometimes tactlessly and even heartlessly did, it caused her pain; and she never liked to tell her age or her year of graduation, for fear of being forced upon the shelf. She became ill on June 22, just the day after the Hunter Commencement; but we were spared the knowledge that she was critically ill until her very last week. I cannot wish her back, for I know now that it would only have been to just such a life of pain and invalidism as she would have counted no life at all. As it was, up till almost the last minute she seemed to have all her old-time vigor. I have mentioned her going to St. Louis in April for the Convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Members of the Faculty and the Alumnae will remember the ardent plea against curtailment of the budget for the municipal colleges which she made before the Board of Estimate on the eleventh of that month. On June 8th she attended a hearing in Washington by a Senatorial Committee on the subject of removing the taxes on margarine; I have been told that she was considered one of the ablest of the proponents, and when I read the transcript of the proceedings which was sent to me after her death, I seemed to see and hear her again in this record of her clear, quick thinking and ready repartee. On June 20, just two days before she was taken ill, she attended a War Bond Drive Luncheon in honor of Mrs. Roosevelt; and in the discussion period asked a question which the First Lady deemed worthy of a twenty-minute answer.

She worked for the Alumnae up to the last. She had been looking forward to the Tea on June eighth, where she was scheduled to address the seniors, an activity that always afforded her great joy, for she loved young people and they loved her; and she was sorry that her trip to Washington forced her to forgo that pleasure. She busied herself even after the beginning of her illness working on the pot-holders which she had promised Mrs. Graff for the Lenox Hill sale in the fall; she completed eleven of these altogether, and took great interest in devising various patterns and color combinations, and in consulting me as to which was the prettiest. She saw the June News through the press, and looked at it with gratification when it came out, particularly asking me to send a copy—which she was too ill to do—to Mr. Ordway Tead, since his report was

mentioned in the editorial. She was already thinking of the next number of the NEWS; the envelope containing one of the items here printed is endorsed in her hand, "Oct. NEWS. Arrived June 29th"—a week after she became ill. I think it is fitting that the very last entry in her beautifully kept diary, under date of June 27, has to do with her Alma Mater: it runs, "Commencement, Hunter College High School, Hunter College."

The precious letters—almost 350 of them—that I received after her death testify to the great number and the wide range of those who loved and admired her. There are letters from the President of Hunter College, and the former Acting President of City College, and the Dean of Women of Brooklyn College; from many members of the Hunter faculty, and student body, and alumnae (including one from her fellow-graduate, Betsey B. Davis, who writes, "Eleonore Funk was a distinguished member of the Class of 1875"); from the President and two Past Presidents of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and from clubwomen in 18 different states; from a State Senator and an Assemblyman and a member of the City Council and a City Magistrate; from F. P. A. of the Conning Tower (to which she occasionally contributed) and "Information Please"; from her oculist and her chiropodist; from the staff of the New Rochelle Pioneer, which prints the ALUMNAE NEWS, and from the staff of a neighborhood shop where she bought her dresses; from "old girls" of P. S. 53, and old neighbors in Yorkville where we lived from my babyhood until 1921; from soldiers in the armed forces, including one whom she came to know when he was a bell-boy in our Chautauqua hotel. Certain qualities of hers seem to have particularly impressed those who knew her, for they are referred to again and again: her wit; her charm; her mental youthfulness and alertness and buoyancy; her courage in fighting for principles, despite her natural sweetness; and her love for humanity, which inspired an answering love on all sides. All these traits she manifested at home as well as abroad, throughout our lives of close comradeship. Truly it might have been said of her,

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety."

E. ADELAIDE HAHN.

CALENDAR, 1944-45

Wed., Nov. 1—Officers and Directors
Sat., Nov. 4—Card Party
Wed., Nov. 22—Alumnae Day
Sat., Nov. 25—Northrop Movie
Dec. 7 and 8—Lenox Hill Sale
Wed., Jan. 3—Officers and Directors
Wed., Jan. 10—Executive Council, eve.
Feb. 13 and 14—Diamond Jubilee
Wed., Mar. 7—Officers and Directors
Wed., Mar. 14—Executive Council, aft.
Wed., May 2—Officers and Directors
Wed., May 9—Executive Council, eve.
Sat., May 19—Reunion, Election

OUR DIAMOND JUBILEE

We are beginning to think of the gala celebration which will take place the week of February 13th. Our college will be 75 years old, and we are hoping and planning to join in the festivities, which are under the able chairmanship of our former President, Helen Simis. Each member of the Alumnae Association will be reached, but meanwhile all are asked to note the dates.

There will be functions in which students, faculty, and alumnae will participate. There will be affairs which the students will give and to which we shall be invited. It will be a real occasion for celebration, and the Alumnae want to give five to ten thousand dollars to the College as a gift which will be a symbol of what Hunter has meant to us these many years. Each of you will receive a letter later—but remember the dates, and begin to budget so that you will have a goodly amount set aside to contribute to our Gift.

It will be a wonderful reunion, and we should like to see every member of the association on those historic days.

Please answer the questionnaire which accompanies this NEWS. We are eager to compile our records and depend upon you for cooperation. Please, we urge you, respond.

MRS. PAUL W. ASCHNER.

Please fill out and return the questionnaire at once in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. *No signature is necessary!*

Questionnaires of similar nature are being sent to all Hunter Students, Faculty, and Alumnae. The 75th Anniversary Committee is endeavoring to compile statistics and gather material of current interest for our Diamond Jubilee Brochure, which will be published in time for the College Birthday. The world will be interested to know what Hunter women think. Your point of view is valuable! Register it here.

Remember—it is possible to get an honest over-all picture of Hunter only if *each* of you will fill in and return this questionnaire. Do it NOW!

HELEN L. SIMIS,

Chairman, 75th Anniversary Committee.

TO HELEN L. SIMIS

In loyal participation
For the College and the Nation,
Helen, our President,
was always in the lead.
When funds were sorely wanted,
Entirely undaunted,
The campaign she carried forward
was certain to succeed.
As a speaker, as an actor,
She has always been a factor
For greater sociability and
getting projects through.
Versatile beyond expression,
Through three terms in quick succession,
She accomplished every good thing
that a President could do.

May, 1944.

RUTH LEWINSON.