

## Chapter 7

### Summary

*“Harper would call you on the telephone. Tell you what she had to say, and – whether you were finished or not -- she would say ‘bye’ and hang-up. She was just a ‘no nonsense woman.’” (A. Frame, personal communication, May 24, 1999)*

The preceding chapters detail the contributions, accomplishments, and events of Laura Jane Harper’s life and career. This chapter provides a brief summary for each of the four original research questions.

Research Question 1. What were the significant factors that influenced Harper to pursue a career in higher education?

There were two significant factors that influenced Harper’s career choice. The first factor was her parents’ values. Mr. Harper taught her to respect and care for people. Mrs. Harper valued education. Both parents demonstrated that they were willing to make sacrifices to live according to their values. Harper’s career in home economics and as a college administrator showed that she shared her parents’ core values.

The second factor was Harper’s Rankin County 4-H Club experience, which exposed her to a land-grant institution, Mississippi State College, and to women who served dual roles as 4-H Club leaders and home demonstration agents. In 4-H she learned basic home economics skills.

Research Question 2: What were Harper's significant contributions as a scholar?

Harper was an active researcher even after she became an administrator. Two particular research projects are discussed in this history. For Harper's dissertation she conducted groundbreaking research in nutrition, studying the eating practices of young women. This study was unique because it included both White and Black subjects. Harper also planned and coordinated the regional study on metabolic patterns of preadolescent children.

Research Question 3: What were Harper's significant contributions as an administrator?

Harper was the founding dean of the School of Home Economics (now the College of Home Economics and Education) at Virginia Tech. Her leadership facilitated the development and accreditation of the college. She led the fight to fund, build, and name Wallace Hall. Harper's vision led to the biennial study abroad program in cooperation with the University of Helsinki. She brought recognition to the college and the university through her service to professional organizations.

Research Question 4: What were Harper's significant contribution to women and minorities?

Throughout Harper's career she was an advocate for women and minorities. She was mentor for Blacks and international students. She recruited Black women from high schools and encouraged them later to enter graduate study. Harper helped White women become acquainted with Black women through a YMCA weekend workshop and other opportunities. Harper encouraged faculty members to earn terminal degrees. She gave advice on careers. She believed that "you can do anything," and she made the women

around her believe in themselves. She was herself a pioneer and a role model for the women who knew her. She challenged Virginia Tech and its chief administrators, both publicly and privately, to recruit women students and faculty, to pay women equally with men, and to provide appropriate support services for women. Even in her death she provides inspiration and opportunities through a scholarship, created in her honor that allows students to attend Virginia Tech and allows her to help those she cared about.

This is an incomplete story. There are more wonderful anecdotes about Laura Jane Harper than will fit in one small thesis. The ones included here provide an introduction to the first female academic dean at Virginia Tech, and her remarkable legacy at Virginia Tech (see Figure 15).

Harper's own final goal for VPI can be glimpsed in this portion of her 1980 Founders Day Speech. She called for

infusion of the VPI faculty and their administrative leadership with large numbers of highly qualified women from all over the world. Achievement of this goal will bring as much prestige and benefit to the University as the inclusion of 7,000 women into the student body. It will provide excitement, new directions, and a magnificent renaissance to higher education in Virginia. (p.13)



Figure 15. Harper, Dean of the College of Home Economics 1960-80.