

Jean Carothers Robbins, 1929 - 2017



http://www.roanoke.com/obituaries/robbins-jean/article_c6e78ea7-2c22-513a-948d-d7febbb6abee.html

Our friend Jean Carothers Robbins was a remarkable woman. After earning a BS in Home Economics from Winthrop College, she did an internship at the Medical College of Virginia Hospital in Richmond where she met her husband, Mal. In the late '50s she gave life to two daughters (who are very sorry that they couldn't be here today), and in 1962 she earned a Master of Public Health in Nutrition from UNC Chapel Hill. For over 15 years Jean was a dietitian and nutritionist in southwestern Virginia, including teaching at Lewis-Gale Hospital and through the Virginia Cooperative Extension. She was president of the Virginia Dietetic Association and, you won't be surprised, she won several awards for her service before she started coursework in 1978 the doctoral program at VPI&SU in Human Nutrition and Foods. Taking just a year off from her Extension duties, Jean completed her dissertation in 1981 when she was in her 50s. Titled "the Development of a Model to be Utilized in the Evaluation of the Telephone as a Vehicle for Nutrition Information," she called her project Dial-A-Dietitian. We can see that she proposed using social media of the time for health consulting.



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Jean always made work fun.

I didn't meet Jean until she had retired and was invited by Dean Janet Johnson to chair the first Advisory Board for the Peacock-Harper Culinary History Friends in 2000 and I had added Special Collections to my department, making it the Digital Library and Archives.



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In addition to creating the Peacock-Harper Board (writing by-laws, drafting Board members, and planning events to attract other culinary enthusiasts, like the group gathered here today), she sought donations of funds from individuals, businesses and organizations. She was instrumental in raising funds for two endowed scholarships to support the research of graduate students using the Peacock-Harper Collection.

Jean also did a tremendous amount of work to grow the Collection far beyond its original 600 books from the shelves of Dora Greenlaw Peacock and Dean Laura Jane Harper. When we marked the 1st decade in 2010, the collection had more than quadrupled. I never saw Jean that she didn't fill my car with books she had solicited for the Peacock-Harper Culinary History Collection.



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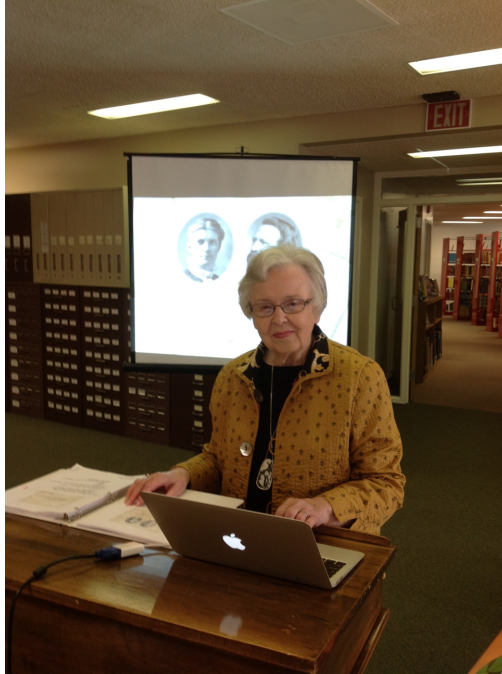
Mary Rapoport aptly described Jean when she responded to my email to the Board about Jean's passing:

Jean was definitely a force. Not just for the Peacock Harper group, but in VA Cooperative Extension, in the VDA (Virginia Dietetics Association), and in everything she touched. She was not only a 'bright idea' gal, but a woman who could gather round her those that could help her facilitate her bright ideas. Her focus was helping to make life better, more nutritious, happier, healthier, more enriched, and the list goes on. She was a true leader but didn't just delegate – she got in the trenches herself to help get things done.



As many of you know, Jean and I wrote a book together about Nannie Figgat and her family. Jean got the Hotel Roanoke Chef, Billie Raper to “volunteer” to prepare a luncheon from Nannie’s and her mother’s recipes, which he translated into contemporary ingredients and instructions included in our book.

In addition to the recipe books in the manuscript collection that I purchased as the head of Special Collections, there was Nannie’s diary, which she kept while her husband Charlie was serving in the Confederate Army, her ledger, and some early correspondence between her father and mother. Jean suggested she and I write an article in order to attract other researchers to the Culinary History Collection. You know how sweet and persuasive Jean can be and I easily succumbed, not knowing that our article would turn into a full-fledged book three years later published by the Botetourt County Historical Society. During that time, we each did research and Jean turned up the valuable photographs of Nannie and her family in the library at Washington and Lee University.



I'll close with one anecdote from that period. Jean suggested that we take a field trip to Richmond because I had discovered letters between Charile and Nannie at the Library of Virginia. This led to an overnight stay and of course we had to have dinner. The memorable part of that trip was not the extraordinary correspondence that we found, but being evacuated from the restaurant as fire trucks pulled up. It was a very cold February evening and we left without paying our bill. We went back the next day, but no one was at the restaurant nor could we reach anyone on several subsequent tries. You know it really bothered Jean that we couldn't reconcile that account.

I'll end with a quote from one of Jean's students who wrote that "Jean's guidance, temperament, smart thinking, level headed approach and leadership will stay with me... Jean exemplified for all of us who knew her how to live a life well and gracefully. My earthly world is dimmer knowing she has gone to heaven."

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Thank you and now I'd like to introduce another extraordinary Jean, Jean Haskell who will introduce our keynote speaker, Ronni Lundy. Jean is a fairly recent addition to the Peacock-Harper Board. Among her qualifications are that she taught Appalachian studies at Virginia Tech and at East Tennessee State University, and she has been instrumental in organizing festivals which highlighted Appalachian Cuisine like the Crooked Road's Mountains of Music Homecoming.

Note: unless otherwise noted, the photographs were taken by the author, Gail McMillan. This presentation was prepared for the Peacock-Harper Culinary History Friends lecture and luncheon in memory of Jean Robbins, "An Appalachian Spring in Three Courses," held April 6, 2018, at the Roanoke Country Club.