

# Mary Elizabeth Massey

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■ Leader in Winthrop history department loved research, writing.

The University of South Carolina Press has recently reprinted "Ersatz in the Confederacy — Shortages and Substitutes on the Southern Homefront" by Mary Elizabeth Massey, who was a member of the Winthrop College history faculty from 1950 until her untimely death in 1975.

Along with teaching popular classes on the Civil War, she also served as chairperson of the department part of that time.

The ordinary people of the South were a particular interest to Massey, partly because they had been so neglected by historians. One of her findings was that shortages cut across economic and social barriers, and had a leveling influence among the people.

She quoted Kate Mason Rowland, "The wealthiest were made poor," and showed how the "spirit of weariness gradually passed into one of lethargy in the last months of the conflict, and mere existence then became the major problem of folks at home."

Mary Elizabeth (everyone called her by both names) was born in Morrilton, Ark., and attended a small Methodist College, Hendrix College in Conway, Ark., where she graduated in 1937 at the top of her class. Hendrix College eventually named her as its first Distinguished Alumna. There followed several years teaching history in a small town high school while saving money for graduate school.

In 1939 she was accepted at the University of North Carolina, the most prestigious university in the South for anyone studying Southern history.

There was no fellowship offer or money for female graduate stu-



Nearby history

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dents. The powers (all male) that granted graduate school money always suspected that women would either get married, were too frail, or, if remaining single, would never be hired by major universities.

Barbara Bellows in her introduction to the new edition of "Ersatz in the Confederacy" tells the story that when Mary Elizabeth met Fletcher Green, UNC's Kenan Professor, she said, "I've heard you don't welcome women."

Green replied, "It's not that we don't welcome them. It's just that we don't do anything for them."

Apparently Green did something for Mary Elizabeth, for in spite of his earlier remark, she dedicated her first book to him.

She received her master's degree in 1940. Her money had run out so she went back to Arkansas and found a job as director of the Hendrix College Training School, a school very similar to the Win-

throp Training School she found when she came to Rock Hill in 1950.

She still hoped to teach in a college, and after two years, found a position at Flora Macdonald Junior College in North Carolina. She saved her money toward working on her doctorate. Then, with so many men off to war, UNC changed its policy of not recognizing women, and awarded her a fellowship to work on her PhD.

Though an outstanding student, she always knew that no large state university would hire her. Her first job was at Chesterton College in Maryland and then to Winthrop in 1950 where she remained the rest of her life.

She was made chairperson of the history department in 1960, received the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in 1963, and gave up the chairmanship in 1964 in order to have more time for her first love, research and writing. In 1972 she was elected faculty representative to Winthrop's Board of Trustees.

Dr. Massey wrote two more books that were both scholarly and popular — "Refugee Life in the Confederacy" and "Bonnet Brigade."

The last book looked at the role of women and argued that the Civil War changed the internal politics of the Confederacy, and in all her books she fought the stereotyped view that Southern ladies were "clinging vines" and "pedestal-sitters."

She felt that the Civil War caused women to become "more active, self-reliant, and resourceful."

Diabetic and ill, though never entirely losing her great sense of humor, Mary Elizabeth Massey could not thoroughly enjoy her final triumph — her election as president of the Southern Historical Association — its first woman president.

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