

Hazel Grove Winesett: The Best Friend

In 2002 Hazel Grove Winesett endowed a gift of \$820,000 to John Preston McConnell Library, the largest endowment that the Library has received to date. The interest on this endowment has allowed McConnell to better serve Radford University in many ways, including funding resources, furnishings, equipment, and the Winesett Library Research Awards which are annual competitive awards of \$500 each for two students for scholarly papers written using library resources. Hazel Grove Winesett has been a best friend to McConnell Library. A look at her life through the many scrapbooks she kept and the memories of a couple of friends shows her to have been an intriguing woman, and remarkably, a best friend not only to McConnell Library, but to many, many people.

Hazel was her parents, Lawrence and Laura Frost Winesett, only child to survive past infancy. She was born April 17, 1913 a true daughter of Southwest Virginia. She was raised in Carroll and Wythe counties. Her father owned a country grocery store in Austinville and lived above it until a fine house was built next door. An internet genealogical website story has Lawrence going to Alaska during the Yukon gold rush, denying success, but returning to build a large home. No evidence could be found that Lawrence had made that trip or had any luck at all; only that he had a great head for commerce, building, and investing. A family friend describes him as being a “classy person with hair parted in the middle. He wore nicely tailored suits and carried himself like Clark Gable – like he was worth a million bucks.” Surviving photographs confirm her description. Growing up, according to a friend, Hazel wasn’t flashy but always had the best shoes and coat to wear to Sunday School. Hazel’s father watched his expenses closely, but didn’t let that hinder his urge to travel. He would load his double-seated touring car with Hazel in front and store-merchandise in the back – bolts of cloth, BC Powders, and pots and pans, and they would set off down the roadway heading for Virginia Beach or Florida, selling as they went, returning when the money ran out. Lawrence prospered. He purchased houses on the south side of Draper Mountain and rented them out. He invested in municipal bonds and the power company. He built many homes for purchase in Austinville. He purchased a downtown hotel in Wytheville when it was in disrepair and on the verge of bankruptcy. Locals laughed at him, but sang a different tune, after he renovated it, ran it successfully for a time, and sold it for a tidy profit.

Hazel was influenced greatly by her strong-willed father after losing her mother when she was 16. She attended Woodlawn schools and graduated from Woodlawn High School in 1932. She matriculated at Radford State Teacher’s College and formed life-long friendships with students and professors before her graduation in 1938. In the College yearbook, *The Beehive*, her home was listed as Max Meadows, Virginia. The only activity listed for her was YWCA. She did not appear to be a joiner at this stage of her life, but she obviously had fond memories of her Radford years.

To know about her life, we are fortunate that scrapbooks were a hobby, if not an obsession for Hazel. She must have saved nearly everything of importance to her and pasted much of it into scrapbooks. Each year she wrote a short one-page Christmas letter that she mailed to over a 100 friends. Five scrapbooks were located for this research and include numerous Christmas letters. Together they provide a spotlight on her interests

and personality. The \$4 bill for her monthly piano lessons which Radford students had to pay for separately was pasted in one of her scrapbooks. The tuition receipts from the 1934-5 Radford State Teachers College were pasted in, as well - \$55 tuition for the winter quarter, \$52 for two other quarters. After she attended her 50th class reunion in 1988 she pasted in a scrapbook the alumni listing of attendees from her graduating class. In her Christmas letter that year, after commenting on the reunion as a highlight of her year, she wrote about her graduation, "When I was handed my degree, I looked down in the audience at my Father and he smiled. That was one of the few times I ever saw him smile in all his life."

Hazel took her first job teaching across the state line in North Carolina's Ashe County, West Jefferson High School. Hazel taught home economics. After a year there something, possibly her life-long love of the ocean, led her to teach in Okaloosa County Florida's Fort Walton Beach High School. After three years of teaching the dutiful daughter moved back to Austinville, possibly to care for her father who passed away in 1950.

In 1947, her father built a small ranch house in Pulaski at 32 1st Street, adjacent to the back of the Maple Shade Inn, the stylish summer resort and railroad hotel in the central city. Hazel moved in and lived there for the rest of her life. She loved to grow flowers in the area around the house. She brought blue and purple *Ageratum* with her from Austinville and over the years it spread around the perimeter of the house. Miss Ollie, Hazel's aunt lived with her for a number of years. In 1951, Jean Blankenship, a new school teacher and graduate of Radford College, then the Women's Division of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, came to Pulaski to teach at Jefferson School directly across the narrow city street from the Winesett residence. Jean rented a room in Hazel's house for three years and became a life-long friend. Jean assisted Hazel with her book-keeping during the last years of Hazel's life.

The modest house and frugal life-style that Hazel maintained in Pulaski for the next half-century disguised her financial worth and surprised her many friends that upon her death she would leave large endowments to not only Radford University, but among others, Lynchburg College, her old school districts, and her church.

The many news clippings of marriages throughout her scrapbooks show a sustained interest in the subject. Hazel had opportunities, but never married. Her interest in the opposite sex and her sense of humor and willingness to make jokes about herself are displayed in her scrapbooks. She wrote, "I really get excited when an old friend marries! The first time I saw Mary after her wedding, she offered me a ride home from down the street. In my excitement I hopped in her car and rode home in style, listening to the joys of marital bliss. After entering my home I heard keys rattling in my pocket—a reminder to walk back to town and bring home my car!!"

In one book she pasted a montage of Radford College buildings in the snow and had written in underneath "Wasn't it about my first formal dance when snow covered these trees and I viewed them with Sneed. The Band played "Star Dust."'" In another book she pasted a clipping of an Eleanor Roosevelt quote, "I craved attention, all through my childhood, because I was made to feel so conscious of the fact that nothing about me would ever attract attention or bring me admiration. I was told that I would never have the beaux that the rest of the girls in the family had because I was the ugly duckling...I was different from other girls, ashamed because I was a wall flower." Hazel must have

identified with the quote, but her father may well have also made her aware that she should be careful of men who could be after her money. In the 1950's she dated several eligible men. While she was dating a J___ M___, she pasted into a book a dinner place card with "Mrs. J___ M___" typed on it and Hazel's note under it, "Somebody was kidding me at this dinner in Hillsville, Va." She pasted in a picture of herself standing in front of a car decorated with just married signs and underneath she had written in "Where's the groom?" Under a 2-inch swatch cut-out in the shape of a little dress – which looks light-purple now, Hazel wrote, "My first evening dress at R.S.T.C. (After 34 years I recognized it, after becoming a cleaning rag.) My piano teacher, Robert Carter (Below) said the color wasn't right for my eyes (He looks like a model and should know)." Pasted below is a striking picture of a dapper professor in sport coat with white pants and white buck shoes.

The probable love of her life was killed in a tragic accident on Route 100 when his car nose-dived into a newly opened sink-hole. He was returning to Virginia Tech after visiting Hazel in Pulaski.

Hazel enjoyed her life in Pulaski. She relished good food, appreciated animals, was an enthusiastic club woman, became an avid traveler, and appears to have been interested in the lives of many people, and a best friend to many of those people.

Several newspaper clippings from the Southwest Times show her interests. At two different times Hazel's favorite recipes garnered articles in the local paper – once for Coconut Pound Cake and once for Carrot Cake. Hazel once wrote a letter to the editor of the Southwest Times lamenting the death of "Seven-Cat," a neighborhood cat. During a rabies epidemic she suspected someone of shooting the "silky black cat with symmetrical white marking which made him look exactly like a walking tuxedo." She begged those in "authority to give us some badge of identification showing that harmless cats need not die." She finished with the thought, "The least we can do for our feline friends these hurried days is show them a little leniency and mercy."

In the early 1950's Hazel became a dedicated member of a local variety show sponsored by the Lions Club and the Business and Professional Women's Club. She sang in the chorus and sold advertising for the show, "Klondike Gold Rush" in 1956. She also sang in the choir at First Christian Church, and was a leader and officer in the Christian Women's Fellowship. She was active in the Pulaski Business and Professional Women's Club. In 1961, an article in Southwest Times noted she was nominated for "Miss Progress" by the club. She promoted the variety show and led the club in a mental health fund raising campaign. She was most "concerned with Camp Easter Seal, a Craig County summer treatment center for crippled children and adults of Virginia. Local organizations send children to the camp each summer. Miss Winesett is interested in all civic ventures, community projects and church activities. Expansion programs at First Christian Church, where she is a member, and the Salvation Army have been among her goals in the past." Although she didn't win the contest, she pasted in a picture of the contestants and the winner.

After turning 50 in the mid-1960's Hazel had what could now be considered a mid-life crisis. In her 1965 Christmas letter she wrote the following:
"I've settled down to a rather quiet mode of living and have curtailed many of my activities. Yet it seems at times there are more duties than I can handle well. Church and some club work, puttering around the house and yard, letter-writing, television and

reading. Just about does it. Doesn't some of this sound like a stepping –stone to old age! If age depends on the elasticity of our spirits, I'll have to admit that my spirits sag now and then. Too, the joy of going out with friends to feast on good food is showing in the form of sagging muscles! The doctor says diet – BUT. Speaking of diets, I found something interesting in material I've collected for my scrapbook: Recipe for Dieters:

1 qt. will power

3 cups stickability

2 cups understanding

1 cup humor

Keep it at agreeable temperature and bake in a cheerful oven.”

Previously, Hazel had made domestic trips – New York City, Florida, and Pennsylvania Dutch Country. Her trips included Broadway plays, and dining in restaurants, and shopping. She kept a post card with “Thanks Hazel and Best of Luck,” signed by Jack Dempsey after a visit to Jack Dempsey's Restaurant in New York City in 1956. During a 1965 trip to New York City she discovered the convenience of airplane travel which appears to have opened, literally, a whole new world to her. In her Christmas letter that year she mentions her wonderful walk down 5th Avenue on Easter morning and also that her flight to get there was beautiful. She wrote, “It's the way to travel.” Air travel was opening up possibilities to see places she'd only read about. Her 1965 Christmas ennui was replaced with a passion for international travel and brought with it notoriety that came with reporting her travel to those folks in Pulaski who, in the 1960's, might only be able to dream of international travel.

In 1966, Hazel went to the West Indies and to Jerusalem and the Middle East through Europe. In 1968 she flew to Hawaii; 1970, to Australia, and in 1971 to Mexico. These trips appear to have been with organized tour groups. She faithfully reported to her friends in Christmas letters bits about her trips. She saved many items for her scrapbook – the note from Edwardo to make sure she would know who to tip, information on accommodations, articles about places she had visited, etc. etc. On her return from trips she became a whirlwind of activity. Giving talks and lectures to many clubs and civic groups around town. Many were reports describing her travels, while others were based on knowledge she gained, such as the talk on “International Affairs” to one local club. In a scrapbook, underneath a 1966 story in the Southwest Times, Hazel wrote in, “I had planned to present trip reports to one group upon my return home and as of 1/5/76, I've reported to 17 organizations. This was the most meaningful trip (Holy land) of all my travels and I've touched down on every continent (except Anarrica (sic)). To have walked where Christ walked is sacred in every respect.” These trips and the resulting talks seem to be a great outlet for Hazel and never again does she write in a Christmas letter about “sagging spirits.”

Religion was an important part of Hazel's life. She was very connected to the First Christian Church. Over the years Hazel donated flowers and gifts to the church and a significant gift of 70 folding chairs to honor her parents. Upon her death she donated enough for a large addition to the building on North Jefferson Avenue which is now named after her. Her scrapbooks contain many religious and inspirational quotes she found of interest. One special one stated, “Every morning lean thine arms upon the window-sill of heaven and gaze upon thy Lord. Then with the vision in thy heart, turn

strong to meet the day. –Author Unknown.” Hazel wrote in below the quote:
“Submitted by my good friend, S___ T___ F___ . This inspirational thought has become a part of my daily meditation. I’ve used it in many parts of the world.”

The pieces of cards and letters from the many friends she made throughout the years were the most notable items in the scrapbooks. Once a friend of Hazel’s – always a friend. She seems to have maintained friendships for her entire life, many through the mail. She kept in contact with students she taught for only a year in both North Carolina and Florida. In 1982 she attended the 40th class reunion of her first class of students, in Ashe County, N.C. She wrote, “One dear student, M___ W___, never forgot she owed me five cents on material I purchased for her in Home Ec. I took approximately 39 years to collect my debt. Her husband “forked up” ten cents, including interest and here it is for safe keeping: Thanks, Madeline!” She glued the dime into her scrapbook.

Throughout the books are clippings about people associated with or events occurring at Radford State Teachers College and later Radford University. Articles on Dr. Moffett; Dr. Thomas, Radford College Psychology Instructor; Virginia H. Butler, Instructor of History; Rebecca Thigpen, Associate Professor Education; and on and on. Articles about RU graduations appear. She saved contributor stickers provided to donors during annual campaigns at Radford.

In her scrapbooks Hazel also saved parts of personal cards and letters with meaning to her. The number of clippings from cards and notes addressed to Hazel with similar sentiments to the following is astounding:

“Bless your heart you are the most wonderful person, and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the nice things you have done.” O___ S

“You are such a thoughtful person. You just do not know how much the entire family is enjoying the lovely potted plant you sent to me for such a small service that I was flattered to be asked to do.”

“It is such a pleasure and a joy to have you for a friend. You enrich the lives of many people, including me. Much Love, E___ W___”

“To the greatest friend I have – You are more than I ever could dream of in a friend.”

“Susanna was wearing the lovely corsage you had sent to her from Hawaii yesterday. That was the sweetest gesture, Hazel and it meant so much to Susanna. You do such lovely beautiful things – no wonder everyone loves you so. H___W___”

In 1969, thirty-one years after her Radford graduation she received a note:
“My Dear Hazel,
I don’t know what I did to deserve such a good, kind and loyal friend. Thanks pal! You will never know what your generous Christmas gifts do for “your children.” Besides being an investment, a generation gap narrower, it rings of Radford’s creed:
"If we work upon marble, it will perish.
If we work upon brass, time will efface it.

If we rear temples, they will crumble to dust.
But if we work upon men's immortal minds,
if we imbue them with high principles,
With the just fear of God and love of their fellowmen,
we engrave on those tablets
something which no time can efface,
and which will brighten and brighten to all eternity."
People are more important than things. You live your love, E___S___B___ - college pal"

On Hazel's birthday in 1985 she received a gift she treasured. J___ G___, who described herself as a college pal from almost fifty years before, wrote Hazel a poem titled, *For Hazel, Lady of Grace* which included the lines:

She is a lady fair of face,
Kind and thoughtful in every way,
She scatters sunshine in life's race
As she greets her friends each day.

She has no sister or brother,
But with nice letters her Trademark
She creates a family of one and many another,
And helps each one be happy as a lark.

After her death, Hazel Grove Winesett proved to be a best friend to Radford University and McConnell Library. A look at her life through friends and scrapbooks allows us to know a little about this special person and the best friend she was to many others during her life. The lines in one of her final Christmas letters are a summary of her life. Hazel wrote, "I thank God for each of my friends because friendship is the secret of a beautiful life."

By Dave Hayes
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Sources: Five of Hazel's scrapbooks
Interviews with Jean Blankenship, Mamie Taylor, and R.P. Taylor

Roosevelt quote: quoted in Dale Carnegie's Scrapbook, edited by Dorothy Carnegie (Simon and Schuster) (Clipping- Red Scrapbook)
"Miss Progress Candidate: Miss Hazel Winesett Backs Civic Work." Southwest Times Sunday February 26, 1961. p4.