

## RUTH HUMPHREY ELLIS

1900 - 1963

Ruth Humphrey Ellis was born on November 11, 1900, in Ansonia, Connecticut. She was a Yankee, and proud of it: she liked to tell of her father's farm and of the many miles she walked to school as a girl. Working in a factory, she earned the money to go to Wellesley, from where she graduated in 1924. She preserved a dedicated attachment to her College throughout her life: few of her friends at Vassar have failed to swell the coffers of our sister college by buying the wrappings and ribbons which Ruth brandished every year at Christmas time.

She took her first teaching position at the Connecticut College for Women, where she arrived on horseback, asking feed and shelter for her mount. But soon she decided to continue her own education and entered the University of Illinois as a graduate student and teaching assistant. There she earned a Master's Degree in 1928 and a Ph.D. in 1930. In that same year she came to Vassar as an instructor, and here she taught until, after 33 years, she died where she had spent so many hours of her life: in the midst of a busy freshman laboratory.

Ruth Ellis studied biochemistry when it was a young science, - still, indeed, called physiological chemistry, - and concerned itself largely with nutrition. Her dissertation dealt with the essential amino acids. After she came to Vassar, the Sanders Chemistry Laboratory was the inhospitable home of rats who struggled along on deficient diets while she directed two students in their research for a Master's Degree.

In 1953-55, Ruth Ellis spent two years organizing the undergraduate chemistry program at the Women's Christian College in Madras.

She fell in love with India, and this love grew into a more general concern for the people of Asia and Africa in their struggle for political and economic independence. As a teacher, the students of these countries were especially close to Ruth's heart, and many of them found a warm welcome in her home. But she also almost single-handedly created the Mid-Hudson International Center for professional and businessmen and women from far lands. Nor did she close her eyes to problems near by: she worked with the NAACP for fair housing practices in Poughkeepsie.

These many and demanding activities became the central concern in her life, and she was happily at work in them on the morning of her last day. She started and ran committees as the price of

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progress, but she was still a Yankee: working as an individual for the welfare of other individuals. She was certain that most of the problems of the world grew from ignorance, and that if people but knew more about each other, these problems would be lessened or dissolved. To her, education was everything, - and everything was education.

Marjorie Crawford

Elizabeth King

Curt W. Beck, Chairman  
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