

## EDITH FAHNESTOCK

1872 - 1957

Edith Fahnestock ended a long and distinguished career as a teacher of modern languages when she died on November 21st at Poultney, Vermont in her eighty-fifth year. At the time of her retirement in 1939, she had been a member of the Vassar language faculty for thirty-one years. During her rich career as a linguist, Miss Fahnestock ranged over the modern languages with a cosmopolitan sense of the whole. She was warmly aware of language, not only as a tool and technique, but as the blood stream of culture.

Born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, she attended school in Cleveland, Ohio. She graduated from the Women's College of Western Reserve University in 1898 with the degree of Bachelor of Letters. After two years, during which she did graduate work at the University of Zurich and at the Sorbonne, she was appointed Fellow in Romance Philology at Bryn Mawr College. Completion of her graduate work was interrupted by intervals of teaching, but in 1908 she received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Bryn Mawr College. Prior to coming to Vassar in the Autumn of 1908, she had been made head of the Department of Modern Languages at Mississippi State College, a position which she held from 1899 to 1906, and after that a member of the Department of Romance Languages at Mount Holyoke College for one year. In the early years of her appointment at Vassar she taught Italian and French as well as Spanish. Under her guidance the Department of Spanish was established as a separate division in 1922, at which time she was made its Chairman. She continued in this capacity through its growth until her retirement in 1939. She worked consistently for the broadening of offerings in the Spanish Department and for any changes in the teaching of languages which would break down barriers to international understanding. Miss Fahnestock's great interest in bringing together the people of this country and the Spanish speaking people not only of Spain, but of this Hemisphere, led her to introduce as early as 1921, courses at Vassar, conducted in Spanish, in the literature and the historical cultural background of Spanish America. She further helped the teaching of Spanish by inviting scholars and young people from these countries to lecture or teach in the Department of Spanish.

### EDITH FAHNESTOCK (Continued)

Miss Fahnestock's publications included a Study of the Sources and Composition of Old French "Lai d'Haveloc" 1915; translation in collaboration with Miss Florence

White of an "Entremes" by Cervantes; the editing in collaboration with Miss Margarita de Mayo of an American edition of "Campo" by J. M. Estrada, 1937; and contributions in 1930 to Current History.

At the time of the Spanish American War a great liberal movement, a twentieth century Renaissance, had arisen in Spain in the work of the so-called generation of '98. Miss Fahnestock was one of the first American language teachers who fully aware of the importance of this movement familiarized American students with the work of Ramon Menendez Pidal, Miguel de Unamuno, Maria de Maeztu, Juan Ramon Jimenez, Jose Castillejo, Jose Ortegay Gasset and many others. Her concern for Modern Spain continued throughout her lifetime.

In 1916 she became a Corporator of the International Institute for Girls in Spain, an organization sponsored by Americans, and staffed entirely by American and Spanish teachers. It provided secondary educational opportunities for the young women of Spain. During the next forty years she continued the connection with the school in various capacities.

In 1927 she gave in Spanish the introductory address to the 17th Spanish Language and Literature Summer session at the Centro de Estudios Historicos, of the University of Madrid. Americo Castro, Professor Emeritus of Princeton University and at that time, Director of the Centre, welcomed the foreign teachers of Spanish. Miss Fahnestock who as an American teacher of Spanish had attended the first session in 1912, was invited to address the group in the name of all the language teachers, American and European. She stressed the importance of the relations between the United States and Spain and advocated the promotion of interest in Spanish culture among teachers of Art, History and Literature. Her speech was published in the issue of "Hispania" of November 1927.

During and after the Spanish civil war and until her death, she aided homeless Spanish refugees with gifts of money and clothing. She worked in the defense of the Anti-fascist committee and the Spanish Loyalists. She helped exiles to find ways to carry on their careers in other countries.

EDITH FAHNESTOCK (Continued)

Colleagues and friends of hers have spoken of the real gift which Miss Fahnestock showed in directing young people into teaching. She had a primary interest and faith in people in whom she honestly welcomed variety, non-conformity and individual differences. Miss Fahnestock continued to live an active life in the communities of Vassar and Poughkeepsie after her

retirement. She was a member of the League of Women Voters; she made frequent trips to Castle Point, where, at the Veterans Hospital, she taught Spanish. For a while she also taught at Greenhaven Prison. In recent years she became very much interested in the study of Russian.

Before and after Miss Fahnestock's retirement, the book-lined living room in the house on College Avenue shared by Miss Fahnestock and Miss Peebles, of the Department of English, was an exciting haven for Faculty discussions and student gatherings. A fire burning on the hearth and good talk -- these were the by-words for several college generations who look back to the hospitality of this house with its lovely view of the Catskills and its rock garden, and the alert teachers who made it a place of warmth and friendliness.

Fran her interest in foreign languages and cultures, to her concern for public affairs, from her activities in behalf of oppressed nations to her kindness towards the stray dog who wandered up hill to her front door, Edith Fahnestock was a humane woman, citizen and teacher.

Respectfully submitted,

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XIV - 273-274