

MARY GERTRUDE MASON

1900 – 1951

Mary Gertrude Mason, one of a family of teachers, fulfilled in her career many of the best qualities of the teaching tradition in our country. Dedicated to the pursuit of learning, she became an able scholar and a teacher beloved by her students. Her colleagues respected her command of her field, her intelligence, her disinterestedness, and her devotion to her profession.

Born in Kentucky and prepared for college in the schools of her native state, she attended the University of Chicago, graduating in 1923. For seven years, thereafter, she served as teacher in school and college in Kentucky, except for a year's interlude during which she secured the M.A. degree at Columbia. Desiring, however, to engage in advanced study, she turned to Far-Eastern history, studying first at the University of Michigan and later at Columbia University which granted her the doctor's degree in history in 1939. Her dissertation dealt with Western Concepts of China and the Chinese 1800-1876. From this she was led on to further studies of the contact of East and West and even during her final illness prepared a review of work on the Chinese in Peru which she did not live to see in print.

Mary Mason came to Vassar in 1944 after terms of service at Brooklyn College and Michigan State College. The increasing importance of her field of specialization and the recognition by her departmental colleagues of her broad and sound scholarship led to her reappointment and later to her promotion to the assistant professorship. Throughout her years of service in the department of history no one outdid her in conscientious dedication to teaching, or in the generosity with which she shared departmental tasks. She distinguished herself by her careful and systematic instruction in the freshman course in European history and communicated enthusiasm to many of her students in Far-Eastern history.

Active in research, she was engaged at the time of her death on a bibliographical study in which she had been assisted by Vassar through the award of MARY GERTRUDE MASON (Continued)

a Faculty Fellowship for the year 1949-50. The significance of this work has been attested by a leading specialist who referred to Mary Mason's death as a distinct loss to Far-Eastern

studies in the United States as well as to Vassar College. Several scholars, also, have since expressed the hope that the study which she had almost completed can be posthumously published. As a teacher, Mary Mason won the respect and affection of her students by her informed presentation of material and her regard for both the lively potentialities and due weaknesses of young minds. With humor and judgment she led them to an awareness of the stringent demands and intellectual rewards of the study of history. As a Resident, she brought her scholarship and qualities as a teacher into her relations with students in the House. With gentle friendliness she established easy companionship. Her amused understanding of the wayward won their confidence. She had great patience and kindness for the slow, as well as insight into the needs and ambitions of superior students. Those who knew her as counsellor or teacher continued to seek her as a valued friend. This capacity for lasting friendship was one of the touchstones of Mary Mason's character. She was a fountain of good sense. Her friends loved her shy, warm smile and enjoyed her quiet humor. They valued her intellectual integrity and felt in her the gentle firmness that came from a sense of proportion. When illness came to her, they were not surprised by her clear courage in the face of death.

Genieve Lamson
Susan Turner
Charles Griffin
XIII - 244-245