

the entry of the United States into World War I. He went first to Washington, as legal advisor, and then became a lieutenant-colonel in the Quartermaster Corps serving with the Twentieth Division in Europe and on the general staff. For his services he was awarded decorations from Finland, Belgium, and the United States. After his discharge in 1919, he returned to New York to combine law and business. He became, in time, director of some varied business corporations. In 1946 he received the degree of LL.D. from the University of North Carolina. He had married Emily H. Bedford in 1910 and they had two sons and a daughter. In 1930 he married Eugenie Ladenburg.

His interest in book collecting, especially Americana, led to his election to this Society in April, 1940. His ties with us were tenuous; his correspondence for a quarter of a century amounting to a letter of acceptance to membership, a note accompanying a check toward annual expenses, and two changes of address. He never attended a meeting. In 1961 he gave his manuscript collection to the Virginia Historical Society. He died in New York on May 21, 1967.

J. E. M.

ESTHER FORBES HOSKINS

Esther Forbes Hoskins, historian and novelist, was born in Westborough on June 28, 1891, the youngest child of William T. Forbes and Harriette (Merrifield) Forbes. A short time later, the family moved to Worcester, where her father was judge of the probate court. Her writing began while she was a schoolgirl and with such skill that one of her mentors at the Bancroft School felt impelled to lecture young Miss Forbes on the danger of plagiarism. She then turned her skill toward a less-mistakenly critical audience, telling her tales to a cat

after she had had quite enough of the jeers of her school-mates. One of these cat-told tales was sold to *Woman's Home Companion* for twenty-five dollars, her first commission for her first published work.

Esther Forbes left Worcester soon after for Bradford Academy, now Bradford Junior College, and then returned to Worcester for two years before enrolling at the University of Wisconsin. There she spent two and a half years before leaving during World War I to aid the American cause as a "farmerette" in Harper's Ferry, Virginia. While there she worked on a story, "Break Neck Hill," which was to win her the O. Henry Memorial Award for 1920. In this year she began a seven-year stint as a member of the editorial staff of the Houghton Mifflin Company, and was responsible for the publication of Sabatini's novel, *Scaramouche*, which had been turned down by eleven publishers before reaching her desk. At the close of this period she had published her first novel, *O Genteel Lady*, the third selection of the brand new Book-of-the-Month Club. Her next book, published two years later, rejected the Victorian world of her first and studied instead the witch trials of New England in the last years of the seventeenth century. This book, *A Mirror for Witches*, was the inspiration for her latest researches toward a history of witchcraft upon which she was working at the time of her death, and was used as a story line for a Sadler's Wells ballet in five acts, commissioned in London.

Her next book, *Paradise*, was not finished until 1937, but was immediately a best-selling historical novel which went through six printings and was reissued in Danish and in Braille. While this book was being written, Miss Forbes had taken out three weeks in 1935 to write *Miss Marvel*. She remained dissatisfied with this pot-boiler and never again succumbed to the temptation. In 1938 she had published *The General's Lady*, a novel about the last days of the

American Revolution. Her next book was one of the books upon which her reputation today rests, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In*. In spite of the paper shortage during World War II, this was reprinted and reprinted; as a Book Club selection, in a condensed version in the *Readers' Digest* and for distribution to servicemen. Duffus, in a review on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* wrote that it was one of the best books of this or any other generation. The citation for her honorary degree from Clark University noted that this book had changed for all time the estimate of Revere as merely a messenger in the night. The book brought her the 1942 Pulitzer Prize for History. It was mentioned further in the citations accompanying her honorary doctorates from both Wellesley College and the University of Wisconsin.

Using materials she had unearthed for the Revere book, Miss Forbes wrote her first juvenile, *Johnny Tremain: A Novel for Young and Old*, which she stoutly maintained gave her more satisfaction than had the Revere book. This novel won the Newbery Medal as the "most distinguished contribution" to children's literature for 1944, and has since been made into a very popular moving picture by Walt Disney, and was translated into a dozen languages, including Japanese. In her later books, success followed success, although upon once being asked how a book she was working on was coming along, she replied, "It's something like putting an octopus to bed."

In recent years she became increasingly dismayed that "too much of New England's countryside is disappearing under cement," and determined to save what could be saved of that heritage. She became very active in such projects as Old Sturbridge Village and the preservation of the Salisbury Mansion. She was also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Years before her election to this Society, Miss Forbes was one of its most faithful users. Originally with her mother and recently alone, she spent such an amount of time doing research in the west alcove off the reading room that it was called familiarly by the staff, the Forbes Alcove. Also before her election she had her nephew, Linwood M. Erskine, Jr., send stock to the Society "for the present moment to be used for anything from washing windows to a rare newspaper." After her election at the April meeting of 1960, Mr. Shipton wrote happily to inform her of her election, noting that "we finally overcame the prejudice against women." He went on to add that "only your combination of virtues could have broken the barrier." A more deserving or more diligent first woman member of this Society would be hard to conjure. She loved this Society long and dearly, and felt a debt of gratitude to it. She considered her large annual gift "my annual membership dues—I make more trouble than most users of the library," a confession the staff of the library would reject categorically.

Much of her generosity to the Society was directed toward the foundation of a memorial fund in memory of her mother, author of *Gravestones of Early New England* and a catalogue of New England diaries, to be spent for the purchase of books and material relating to New England.

After a long illness, she died on August 12, 1967 in the Memorial Hospital, Worcester. She had always preferred Worcester for her work, as she felt that here she was able to write, unlike Boston or New York, where "the impulse to write is often dissipated in talk." In 1926 she was married to Albert Learned Hoskins, but they were divorced in 1932. She leaves two brothers, Dr. William T. M. Forbes and Alan W. Forbes, and two sisters, Cornelia B. Forbes and Mrs. Linwood M. Erskine.

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