

Memorial Minute for Mary Helen (Hodge) Laprade
Read by C. John Burk at the November 20, 2013 Faculty Meeting.

Mary Helen (Hodge) Laprade, lecturer emeritus in Biological Sciences, died in Northampton on August 18 at the age of 84. She was born in Oakland, California, and educated in the California public schools. She came East in the late 1940s to complete an A.B. degree at Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania and graduated Summa cum laude in 1951 with highest honors in Biology. A year later, she completed an A.M. degree at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, MA, and in 1958 received her PhD from Radcliffe, earning an award for the most original doctoral thesis of that year. Her dissertation was a study of regeneration in the land crab, *Geocarcinus lateralis*, and she continued to study the land crab and other invertebrates throughout her long academic career. While a graduate student, she served as an instructor in Biology at Simmons College and then as a teaching fellow in Biology at Radcliffe. In 1958, she was appointed an assistant professor in what was then the Zoology Department at Smith College. That same year, she and her husband Ken, a lawyer, were married and established themselves in Easthampton, and in 1960 she took time off from academia to care for their two children, Elizabeth and Charles.

In 1964, she returned to what would soon become the Department of Biological Sciences here at Smith, teaching both Invertebrate and Vertebrate Zoology as well as participating in our ever-changing offerings in Introductory Biology. A decade later, she accepted an appointment as Director of the Clark Science Center, a position she filled with quiet distinction until 1989. Thinking back on her success as an administrator, I believe one of her great strengths was that she knew whom to talk to in the College community, and more importantly, she knew how to talk with them.

She then returned to teaching, specializing in an Invertebrate Zoology course from which emerged several students who have gone on to become prominent in the field of invertebrate biology today. She also took on a new teaching assignment to participate in the department's course in Biogeography. Biogeography is by its very nature an interdisciplinary offering, one that profits from the viewpoints of at least two disciplines. At that time in the class, I discussed the plants; Mary discussed the animals, and she quickly developed a delightful series of lectures, expounding on the complex lives of creatures ranging from flightless birds and Australian mammals down through the locust swarms that still plague Africa.

Over the years, she has played a surprising number of different roles within the Smith community. Always a stalwart in departmental chores, she also served the College as a member of the Library Committee, which she chaired in 1990-92, the Committee on Honorary Degrees, and the Marshall's Committee. I believe many of her colleagues outside the sciences may have known Mary best in her role as a Marshall, where she seemed to exemplify dignity, civility, reliability and order. She also seemed to enjoy the task and was amused when, after her retirement shortly after the Millennium; College Hall seemed to have assumed she would continue in this role. She asked about this and was assured she was not expected to do so; then, as a major event approached, found herself nonetheless asked to serve just one more time as a favor.

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Again, elected to Phi Beta Kappa her junior year at Wilson College, at Smith she served the Zeta of Massachusetts chapter in various capacities, as Treasurer and then President, and, for years, working on the Admissions Committee to prepare the ballot for elections, a complicated task I believe she relished.

In her retirement, her energies undiminished, Mary began a new career as a volunteer for the College Botanic Gardens, working with classes at various levels as well as the general public. To prepare herself for these responsibilities, she audited courses in botany, including their associated field trips. Using her teaching skills to full effect, she regularly led tours of the Lyman Plant House, including expeditions through the greenhouses that focused on the biogeographic aspects of our plant collections.

My last conversations with Mary involved assistance she gave to our younger son Nicholas, who maintains a blog that deals with climate change and global affairs. Nicholas needed information that would help explain how the recent strife associated with the Arab Spring was somehow related to outbreaks of locusts in northern Africa. I advised him to write to Mary, whom he had known since childhood, about this. He did so, and via email she patiently led him through the complexities of the locust life cycle and the ways that neglect of effective control at certain stages could lead to famine in the region.

She possessed to the end a clear intelligence, an understated wit, and a sense of obligation to her family, the College, her colleagues, and to science. She was one of those persons whom one relied on and assumed would go on forever. She leaves her husband of 55 years, her two children and two grandchildren. She will be greatly missed.