

Flora Thurston Allen

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Flora Thurston Allen was an idealist and a theorist. Her broad background in education and her wide experiences with many types of persons in a variety of situations prepared her to play a unique role in the field of education. After her early education in Toledo, Ohio, where she lived as a child and young woman, she entered Teachers College, Columbia University, where she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees and where she continued her graduate studies in the areas of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and other fields that enriched her background and broadened her point of view. During her study periods Miss Thurston held both a National Research Council Fellowship and a Laura Spellman Rockefeller Scholarship. Between 1925 and 1937, she held positions at Vassar College, at Oregon State University, in the National Council of Parent Education, and at the U.S. Office of Education.

From 1917 to 1925, Miss Thurston was a member of the Cooperative Extension Service of the College of Home Economics at Cornell University in the area of child development and family relationships. After her period of graduate study and her positions in other institutions she returned to Cornell in 1937, first as professor of rural education in the College of Agriculture and later as professor of home economics education in the College of Home Economics. Her teaching and research in the Field of Home Economics Education at the graduate level, as well as her vision of future possibilities, resulted in the creation of a strong graduate program in that area.

Professor Thurston was an exciting teacher, stimulating many students, frustrating some, but provoking all to explore wider horizons of knowledge. Although she was very aware of practical problems faced by families in rearing their children and by educators in their development of family life programs, she never took a purely pragmatic view. Rather, she would encourage both colleagues and students to probe all aspects of an idea for soundness and worth as bases for examining possibilities for implementation. She stimulated students to learn for themselves; those who expected to be spoon-fed were disappointed. She had little use for conformists and was inclined to take an opposing point of view during discussions in order to encourage a wide sphere of thought concerning a problem.

While at Cornell, Professor Thurston opened a new world to many of her students, particularly those from other countries, through her Sunday evening gatherings in her home. At these informal supper parties, students were given an opportunity to share in discussions of current world problems with distinguished faculty members and University visitors. Thus they were spurred on to further animated and constructive discussion among themselves.

After Professor Thurston retired from Cornell as professor emeritus of home economics education, she continued her professional activities. At first she taught human development at Chatham College in Pittsburgh; later she moved to California and there engaged in a wide variety of family-oriented educational interests which culminated in particular concern for the needs of the aging. During this later period she married Walter Allen and shared several happy years with him until his death.

Flora Thurston Allen's former colleagues and students who have had contact with her in recent years have expressed delight and amazement at her memory of their individual concerns and ambitions and at the renewal of warm personal relationships with her. Those who had the privilege of talking with her during the last months of her life, when she was in pain and knew that her death was imminent, were deeply impressed by her continued interest in the professional activities of her friends and in her concern for the American family. This stimulating, attractive, and intelligent woman will be greatly missed by her friends.

Margaret Hutchins, H. Irene Patterson, Kathleen Rhodes