

# Beulah Blackmore

*April 6, 1886 — July 29, 1967*

Miss Beulah Blackmore joined the faculty of Cornell University in 1915 as the first full time clothing instructor in what was then the Department of Home Economics. She became Assistant Professor in 1916 and Professor in 1923. In 1925 when Home Economics became a separate college with its own departments, she was appointed Head of the Textiles and Clothing Department. She retired in 1951 as Professor Emeritus after thirty-six years of teaching and administration.

Professor Blackmore was born in Vassar, Michigan. She received the B.S. degree from Teachers College, Columbia University, following two years of study at Michigan State Normal School, Ipsilanti, Michigan, where she obtained a teaching certificate. Before coming to Cornell Miss Blackmore taught in the public schools of Howard City, Michigan, and Tacoma, Washington. After her appointment at Cornell University she continued with additional professional study at Oxford College for Women, Oxford, Ohio; University of Washington at Seattle; University of California at Berkeley; New York School of Fine and Applied Arts in New York City and in Paris, France; Grace Cornell Art School in Maine; Academie de Coupe de Paris; and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

At the time the School of Home Economics became a college, the Department of Textiles and Clothing was well established. Prior to 1925 and in the following years, Miss Blackmore made an intensive study of areas relative to the field of textiles and clothing for the purpose of planning the breadth and scope of the future program of the Department. For several months she worked with a nationally famous hotel, studying the use of textiles by hotels, their selection, care and durability; she visited textile industries in search of implications for textile research appropriate for the College; she worked for a year in New York City department stores; she spent a half year as an extension specialist to observe textile and clothing needs of families. As a result of her wide formal and informal study of the arts, science and industry, together with the needs of consumers, her Department expanded from an offering of three courses in clothing construction to more than twenty-five offerings and to a faculty of nineteen persons in the total program of research, resident and extension teaching. She saw the teaching of clothing change from that of clothing construction primarily to teaching in which design and consumer selection were the major components. A like change occurred in textiles which moved from the study of a few natural fibers to that of a vast array of man-made fabrics and finishes.

Four widely separate innovations occurred during her years as administrative Head of her Department at Cornell University: the establishment of a costume shop; the introduction of courses for undergraduate men students; the collection of historic and native costumes and textiles; and research in textile science and the psychological aspects of clothing.

The purpose of the Costume Shop, which flourished for many years, was to give students experience in designing and producing apparel for a varied clientele. This clientele was composed of faculty wives, staff members, and women from all over the United States and other countries. Among the most popular and steady customers was the colorful wife of Cornell's President, Livingston Farrand. In preparation for offering such a course Miss Blackmore worked in a number of retail clothing establishments including Lord and Taylor and Bonwit Teller in New York and William Filene Sons Company in Boston. Increased enrollment, lack of space and staff, changing trends in curriculum brought to a close an experience that many students of that era will long remember as one which called upon their skills and abilities to work with and understand people whose ages, desires, and community environments differed from their own.

Since the forerunner of the present School of Hotel Administration was housed in and administered by the College of Home Economics, students in that school were familiar with the value of courses in the College. For many years Miss Blackmore taught a course in the selection and purchase of hotel textiles. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of these male students, particularly those returning to college life after a period in uniform during World War II, initiated the demand for a "consumer" course in men's clothing selection. The registration in this course was by no means limited to men from the School of Hotel Administration.

To Miss Blackmore clothing and textile fabrics were vital forms of art. She saw them as expressing bold and subtle differences of culture and times. Moreover, they were forms of art that could be created and enjoyed at all economic levels. She started a collection of American and foreign costumes, fabrics, and accessories. In 1935 she brought to the Department from a trip around the world carefully selected native costumes and fabrics as well as colorful stories of interest to students who at that time did not have the opportunity of wide travel as they do today. The costume collections have continued to expand and provide students in apparel design with inspirations for designs, and through use in the history of costume courses have given understanding of clothing as an indicator of the economic, cultural, technical, and social life of other times and other places.

To an already valuable collection Miss Blackmore's final gift to the Department was her personal historic collection of some 200 items including rare textiles and books now out of print and unobtainable.

A realization of the significant but inadequately understood part that clothing plays in the lives of individuals prompted her in the late forties to appoint a psychologist to the faculty to study and develop research on clothing as it affects attitudes and behavior of individuals. Concurrently with this appointment, textile chemists also were appointed to develop this area of textiles and to provide the bewildered consumer with information in this highly technical realm through a research program. New York State, then perhaps more than even today, was the major center for clothing and fabrics in the United States.

Miss Blackmore will long be remembered with deep appreciation as an administrator who constantly encouraged and supported exploration of new ideas for program development and who recognized and nurtured the special abilities and assets of individual faculty members. They also remember her knowledge of the world of arts as well as her abiding respect for the unique quality of each human being and her expectation that others would also recognize and respect this uniqueness. In her years of teaching and travel she made a host of friends around the world who remember fondly her charm, gaiety, poise, quick wit, and humor.

*Mabel Rollins, Elsie McMurry, Margaret Humphrey*