

Helen J. Recknagel

September 6, 1910 — November 19, 1992

Helen J. Recknagel, a member of the University Faculty for over thirty years, is best remembered for her remarkable effort and success in founding, then editing for fifteen years, the Hotel School's quarterly magazine, until recently the only academic journal in the field. In addition, Helen was the first woman faculty member in the Department and the first woman to gain tenure.

Helen was born on September 6, 1910, in Stratford, Oklahoma, and occasionally commented—always with great pride—on her Cherokee ancestry. She attended the public schools in Ardmore, Oklahoma and graduated from Oklahoma State University with a Bachelor of Science degree, in 1932. She continued her education at the University of Chicago (M.B.A., 1937) and New York University (Ph.D., 1953). Early employment included positions with Standard Oil of Indiana and the National Association of Manufacturers as well as an appointment as assistant professor at the University of Tulsa.

Helen joined the Department of Hotel Administration, then a division of the School of Home Economics, in February 1943 to teach business communications—then little more than secretarial courses. From this beginning she began to offer a variety of technical writing classes, not only for the women students, but to enhance the managerial skills of all “Hotelies.” During these early years Helen's research involved studying the role of professional women in the workplace. Among other projects, she conducted research with the Hotel Sales Management Association and worked for such organizations as Hilton Hotels. Too, she took an active service role with New York State Cooperative Extension and was a national officer of two business fraternities, serving as president of Sigma Alpha Sigma in the mid 1950s.

Without question, it is Helen's legacy at *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* which is most remarkable and for which she will ever be remembered. In 1960 Dean Meek decided to establish a journal to serve the hotel and restaurant industries and to provide an outlet for faculty writing and research. But the School needed someone to take on its leadership. There was only one logical choice: Helen Recknagel was selected, not only to determine the necessary logistics but to serve as its first editor, a position in which she continued for more than 15 years and for 65 issues. In this capacity, she dealt not only with all the faculty and other academics but, perhaps to her male colleagues' chagrin, with more industry executives than most if not all of them.

Her successor as editor, Paul Beals, recalled working with Helen: “It is impossible to be timid or bland in writing about Helen Johnson Recknagel. Helen had her own perspective, her own firmly held view of persons, of events, and of our industry in general. You may not have agreed with Helen or fully comprehended, but you knew where she stood. Pride, dignity, aplomb, and no small measure of grit characterized her. Surely *The Quarterly* would not have survived to be what it is today without Helen’s distinctive qualities.”

In addition to the magazine, Helen produced a number of manuals and two books during her editorship. One of these, *Marketing for a Full House*, written with C. DeWitt Coffman, became the seminal marketing handbook for the industry and still is in demand more than thirty years later. The book evolved out of a business communication class which had adopted a sales and marketing theme. Few remember that she was instrumental in adding sales and marketing courses to the School curriculum and finding the industry practitioners to teach the first several terms; the field has grown to be among the most popular in the School.

Stories abound about Helen’s forceful leadership. She was a part of everything in and about Statler Hall. She took many junior faculty members under her wing and counseled—even cajoled—them as they made their career decisions. She eagerly met with international visitors, especially the participants in the Hotel School’s “Summer School/’ as the week-long professional seminars were generally known for several decades. At an early picnic at Taughannock Park she fearlessly took her turn in a faculty-student softball game and was involved in a bone-jarring collision during a run-down between first and second base. Helen threw herself headlong into everything she did, and she accomplished so much.

When she retired in 1976, Helen was named professor emerita. She continued to live in Ithaca until her death on November 19, 1992. Her husband, Arthur B. Recknagel, had died thirty years earlier. Helen Recknagel is survived by a daughter and son-in-law, Carol I. and Earl B. Neigh, Jr., of Ithaca; two grandsons, Robert Neigh of Tupper Lake and Phillip Neigh of Ithaca; two nephews; and several great nieces and nephews. Countless others around the world, hotel and restaurant and tourism professionals especially, will always remember Helen for her myriad contributions to the School and to the hospitality industry.

Robert M. Chase, Glenn Withiam, Richard H. Penner