

Frances Spratt

June 13, 1906 — July 9, 1997

Frances Marion Spratt, Associate Professor in the Department of Textiles and Clothing in the College of Human Ecology, died on July 9, 1997, at the age of 91 in Mt. Holly, North Carolina.

After her retirement on June 15, 1967, Frances returned to live with her sisters: Elizabeth Spratt and Mrs. George Hacker in the family home in Mt. Holly where she was born. The imposing homestead was a working cotton plantation when her grandfather brought her grandmother there as a bride. Union soldiers were stationed there during the Civil War and a union sword is evidence of their occupation. After her grandfather died, her father took a position in town, but maintained the home place as a country home with all of the advantages of a self-sufficient farm with orchards, vegetable gardens, farm animals and gardens so that very little else was needed. Entertainment was almost completely centered at home, with visits from friends and summer reunions with relatives from South Carolina. Frances was proud of her southern heritage and claimed a signer of the Declaration of Independence as one of her ancestors.

With this background, Frances and her sisters developed a strong family relationship, a love of the land and their home, and the homemaking skills, which influenced their lives and their careers.

After attending Mt. Holly High School, Frances graduated from Women's College in Greensboro (now the University of North Carolina in Greensboro). She taught home economics in several high schools in North Carolina including at Mt. Holly High School where she set up an innovative project of a model home in a vacant building. Her students learned how to shop, do banking and other home activities including taking a trip to Charlotte to lunch at a nice restaurant so they could learn how to order a proper meal. Many of her former students still remark about the wonderful experiences they had in Miss Spratt's classes.

During World War II, Frances was asked to head up a community project, "The Community Canning Center," where residents in and around Mt. Holly could bring their produce to be canned in a safe, easy, and quick manner. She received great praise from the community for this hard and confining work.

Frances attended summer school at Cornell in 1946 and later returned for her M.S. degree. She served as a teaching assistant in the Department of Textiles and Clothing in 1948-49 while working on her degree that she received in June 1949. After this, she taught for four years at the University of Texas until she returned to Cornell in 1953 as a faculty member of the College of Human Ecology (Home Economics).

Frances was exceptionally knowledgeable in her field. She also had great skill in disseminating this knowledge to her students through her courses in apparel design. In 1964, she was selected as “outstanding professor in the College for her superior teaching ability, her warm and friendly personality and her helpful attitude in all matters in the College.”

In addition to her regular academic responsibilities, she also served as advisor to Omicron Nu, a scholastic fraternity, chair of the college undergraduate awards committee, and a member of the college student-faculty committee. She was a member of Pi Lambda Theta, The American Home Economics Association, and membership chairman of the southern region of the N.Y. Home Economics Association.

Frances enjoyed travel and developed an especial fondness for Denmark, where she lived for several months. Frances and her two sisters spent considerable time in restoring and refurbishing the old homestead. The large, high ceilinged gracious rooms were furnished with family antiques and mementos and many examples of exquisite embroidery lovingly executed by Frances, her sisters and past generations as well as by her three nieces. Frances’ special pride was the elegant dining room with its crystal chandelier, which Frances had found in Ithaca, Swiss tambour embroidered curtains and her collection of blue and white Royal Copenhagen porcelain displayed in shell carved corner cabinets.

Frances and her sisters were excellent cooks in the old southern tradition, and true southern hospitality was always a way of life. Frances was famous for her delicious home baked bread, and her old-fashioned spoonbread was a toothsome delight along with Southern fried chicken, garden vegetables and ambrosia dessert. Not to ignore the garden, Frances loved her roses and peonies. The home was surrounded by huge southern magnolias, azaleas, live oaks and a tremendous beech tree, which shaded the front lawn and was planted by her grandfather.

Frances will always be remembered for her gracious manner, her beautiful prematurely snow white hair and her petite well-tailored style. She epitomized the very best of the southern gentlewoman.

W. Jean McLean, Elsie McMurry, Raymond T. Fox