

Sara E. “Sally” Blackwell

August 9, 1916 — January 4, 2009

Professor Sara E. “Sally” Blackwell was born in Dunbar, Pennsylvania and graduated from Dunbar Township High School as valedictorian. She received a Bachelor’s degree in 1938 and a Master’s degree in 1944 from Pennsylvania State University. After teaching in Pennsylvania high schools, she studied home economics education and child welfare at the University of Minnesota. Her research dealt with the effectiveness of home economics education in Minnesota high schools. While at Minnesota, she participated in the Food Production War Training Program that involved establishment and supervision of a community cannery. She helped plan and participated in conferences for student teachers, teachers in service, school administrators and school community groups. In 1947-48, she consulted on tests and surveys on nutrition for General Mills and authored a bulletin, “Nutrition Education Pays Dividends.” She received the Ph.D. degree in 1950.

Professor Blackwell joined the Cornell University faculty in the College of Home Economics in 1948 as an Assistant Professor to develop a research program in the Department of Home Economics Education. She taught research design, analysis, and program evaluation, and she had a special interest in curriculum development. She was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor on July 1, 1954 and Professor on July 1, 1958. Sally served as Chair of the Department of Community Service Education from 1959-69, and advised graduate students and served on many graduate committees. She has a national reputation for her work in graduate education, research, and curriculum development in home economics education. During a sabbatical leave in 1955 in the Research Division at Education Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey, she worked on projects in the area of personality measurement. Her general area of research was education evaluation. Her work addressed factors in school and communities that related to the effectiveness of high and junior high school home economics programs.

In 1965-67, Sally chaired President James Perkins’ College of Home Economics Study Committee. The resulting Blackwell Report, according to Professor Jerry M. Rivers,

“documented the concerns, provided the framework, and solidified the goals of a college longing and needing to struggle with the challenges of a changing world.”

She described Sally as combining “scholarly skepticism, wisdom, patience, humility, and the perseverance of a pioneer in a masterful and compassionate manner.” The challenges associated with the committee were legion, and Professor Rivers, as a member of the committee, described Sally undertaking the effort to,

“amalgamate the divergent thinking of eight committee members, temper the grandiose verbiage of six outside consultants who were leaders in their respective fields, and see that a document was drafted that incorporated vision, imagination, and common sense!”

The committee report provided an academic and substantive guide to the future College mission. It documented the concerns and provided the framework for solidification of the future goals of the college as it addressed the challenges of a changing world.

The follow-up committee to propose a restructuring of the College departments and administration, chaired by Henry Ricciuti, relied heavily on the Blackwell Report so that the recommended reorganization reflected many of the priorities and goals from that report. Further, the Blackwell report had a national and international impact, charting new directions for education and research in home economics and the new human ecology.

Professor Blackwell was a member of the University Faculty Council and served on a number of committees that dealt with major university problems during a turbulent decade at the university. Dean David Knapp wrote in 1972, “She has gained a deserved reputation for academic leadership, both on and off campus”. She served as a consultant to the Department of Home Technology of the University of the Philippines, establishing relationships with faculty that lasted for many years. She was an active member in the American Home Economics Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the American Vocational Association serving in various top-level capacities, and served as a consultant to the Office of Education, and U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. She was on the Editorial Board of the *Home Economics Research Journal*. One of her colleagues wrote at the time of her promotion in 1954, “She has proven herself to be an excellent teacher, a creative research leader, and a most helpful colleague”.

She received the Outstanding Achievement Award from the University of Minnesota in 1973. The award is given to alumni who have attained distinction in their fields. She was named Professor Emerita by Cornell University in 1980.

Sally will be remembered for her grace and courage, wit and humor, her humility, and her compassionate concern for humankind. She was generous to Cornell, to her church and to many organizations in Ithaca. Concern for the environment led her and her beloved sister, Louise, to donate their Pennsylvania homestead land to the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy. Her unassuming manner and her small frame belied her strong political opinions and her belief in women’s rights and choices. Her love of chocolate and enjoyment of televised figure skating were unfailing!

She is survived by cousins, many friends, and former graduate students.

Francille M. Firebaugh, Chairperson; S. Kay Obendorf, Henry N. Ricciuti