

Mabel A. Rollins

May 19, 1909 — December 18, 1986

Mabel A. Rollins, professor emerita of household economics and management, died on December 18, 1986, in Chatham, New Jersey. She was born an American citizen in London, England, to the late John G. and Mabel Rollins. The family was engaged in an importing and exporting firm in both New York City and London. Mabel Rollins was at home in both countries. She was a partner in John G. Rollins and Sons in New York and a director of Rollins and Sons in London for most of her adult life.

She transferred to Cornell from Packer Collegiate Institute and received a Bachelor of Science degree in home economics in 1932. Between 1932 and 1940 she worked as a graduate assistant and lecturer in the Department of Economics of the Household and Household Management while she studied for her advanced degrees. There were several interruptions in her studies, as she returned to work in the family business for short periods of time. Mabel may have seriously been trying to decide her future. She was very close to her father; having no brothers, she could have had a career in the family business. However, with the encouragement of Professor Helen Canon, head of the department, Mabel completed her Ph.D. in 1940. Her doctoral program combined work in home economics with a strong background in economics, statistics, and related areas from throughout the university.

After completing her Ph.D., she returned to New Jersey and the export-import firm. It is evident from her correspondence with Helen Canon that her heart and her head were more attracted to academia. Professor Canon encouraged her enthusiasm for ideas, particularly those related to the world of work and more specifically to the neglected area of women's work in the home. These two women obviously sparked each other—they were intent on integrating an understanding of economics, markets, work, and home to address the basic problems of society: feeding, clothing, and housing people. They saw the family as the most efficient organization to do that task.

Mabel Rollins returned to Cornell in the fall of 1942 as an assistant professor in economics of the household and household management. Thus began a long and productive academic career. In 1952 she was chosen to receive the first annual Professor of Merit Award for Distinguished Teaching by the seniors in home economics. She was named head of the department in 1952 and continued in that capacity until she retired and was named professor emerita in 1969.

Mabel Rollins dedicated her professional life to studying and improving the economic well-being of families. Her understanding of the interrelatedness of activities in the home and the functioning of consumers in the market

furthered the development of programs that emphasized resource allocation and use. Her leadership in that area was nationally recognized. She served as a member of the advisory committee to the Bureau of Labor Statistics on the 1960-61 survey of consumer expenditures, and she chaired the Family Economics and Management Section of the American Home Economics Association. In her later years she helped develop programs related to the legal aspects of consumer issues, disadvantaged groups in urban areas, and health agencies responsible for training employees of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Mabel Rollins's national reputation is impressive, but her strongest and most lasting accomplishments were made in her work with graduate students and faculty in a developing field of study. Her ability to generate ideas with unique linkages was an outstanding trait. A discussion with Professor Rollins was always a stimulating experience. She was an administrator of rare quality and provided evenhanded support among the faculty for the competing interests of management, economics, and science in the home. At the same time she encouraged developments in research, extension, and resident teaching. Her genuine respect for the individual—faculty member, clerical worker, and graduate student—brought forth dedicated service and achievement. She was a good listener—she encouraged the expression of ideas and helped create an environment that would enhance the development of each staff member. Her philosophy of providing support to seed ideas fostered new research directions and change. She insisted that graduate students develop a sense of professionalism while studying for their advanced degrees. She held memberships in, and contributed to, numerous professional associations and was elected to membership in Omicron Nu and Phi Kappa Phi, both national honoraries. She was listed in *Who's Who in America* and *Who's Who of American Women*.

Mabel Rollins viewed the responsibility for the department, the college, and the university as *ours*, belonging to faculty and students—even when it meant accepting the obligation for the more routine chores. As an administrator she was a strong advocate of Carl Becker's idea of "freedom with responsibility." One of the authors of these notes remembers being given a copy of Becker's book to read on the plane as she returned home after her initial interview.

Professor Rollins had a strong sense of economic and social justice. She passionately disliked segregation, whether by race, sex, or age; by social or economic status; or by political or religious thought. She was an avid reader, a producer of new ideas and insights. She resisted change for the sake of change but encouraged it wherever she could see the potential for progress.

Mabel Rollins had the ability to ask penetrating questions that helped to give perspective and provide impetus to progress. In recognition of her contributions as a teacher, scholar, and leader, at the time of her retirement the

faculty of the Department of Household Economics and Management (now known as Consumer Economics and Housing), together with former students, established a Cornell University scholarship in her honor—the Mabel A. Rollins Scholarship Fund. It is awarded annually to a graduate student who wants to specialize in the study of economic and managerial problems of families.

She is survived by a sister, Ruth Rollins of Madison, New Jersey, and two nephews. A memorial service was conducted on June 13, 1987, in Anabel Taylor Chapel during reunion week.

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