

Gladys Loraine Peterson Butt Van Cleve

November 23, 1896 — December 20, 1992

Professor Emerita Gladys Loraine Peterson Butt Van Cleve died at home in Friday Harbor, Washington, on December 20, 1992. She is survived by her husband, Professor Emeritus Ferdinand H. Butt Van Cleve, and by a sister, Ruth Windsor of Friday Harbor, and numerous nieces and nephews. An associate professor in the Department of Textiles and Clothing of the New York State College of Home Economics, she retired in 1959. She and her husband moved to Washington State to be near to their families in Seattle, adopting the name Van Cleve, Professor Butt's Mother's family name.

Born in 1896 in Wadena, Minnesota, Gladys grew up on a farm, a member of a family of nine brothers and sisters, several of whom went to college, making it necessary for her to earn her way. She did this by selling encyclopedias in the backwoods and rural areas of Washington and Oregon. She was treated well by farm families who frequently took her in out of concern because she was so tiny and so young. But life to Gladys was an adventure. It wasn't so much what happened to you that mattered, it was what you did about it that counted—a philosophy which she shared with students, colleagues, homemakers, community groups, friends and family throughout her life. Most of these can tell stories of her solutions to problems— some hilarious, but all both imaginative and pragmatic.

Gladys graduated from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1928, one of the three top students in the University. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in home economics, with a strong background in chemistry, which she later put to practical use at Cornell with the emergence of synthetic fibers. Her M.S. degree was from Columbia University in 1945 with a major in philosophy of education.

As a newly married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Butt came from Washington State to Cornell University in 1928, where Ferd became a candidate for the Ph.D. degree in the College of Agriculture (Entomology) and Gladys was appointed clothing specialist in Cooperative Extension. They arrived on campus in the depths of the Depression. No one had ever heard of "Welfare" and most families had little money and were "making do". Gladys's assignment in Cooperative Extension was "to extend the resources of the Department of Textiles and Clothing to the people of New York State." Extension at that time was organized into community groups of homemakers by the county home economists. The latter identified needs of families by interaction with them. In those Depression days, American women sought to lift themselves by their bootstraps, and Gladys was equipped to help. Through her bulletins and her demonstrations she taught them how to use what they had. Her Cornell Extension bulletins

were classics. *Keeping Clothes Wearable*, #536, and #984, *Home Methods of Stain Removal* could not keep up with demand, and long after her retirement the College was still receiving requests from Alaska for #838, *Make Your Furs Wear Longer*. Our present day concepts of health and fitness were low on the scale of conscious concerns of these Depression families, but Professor Butt saw the need to lift spirits by introducing lessons in posture, in fitness, and in ways to become physically more attractive, especially for candidates for jobs outside the home. In these days of women's magazines and of women's liberation, it is difficult for us to imagine how innovative these programs were. But the women knew, and they blocked the corridors of Martha Van Rensselaer Hall during "Farm and Home Week" hoping that she would repeat her lectures to the overflow crowds.

In 1937, Mrs. Butt was appointed assistant professor for the resident undergraduate program in the College of Home Economics. She was one faculty member who really knew the families of her students. She had first hand understanding of those who sacrificed to send their daughters to Cornell University when there was little financial aid and few scholarships. These students sought Mrs. Butt's counsel in managing wardrobe problems and personal appearance standards. Most of all, through her teaching, based frequently on her knowledge of chemistry, and her involvement with honorary societies such as Omicron Nu and Iota Sigma Phi, she encouraged scholastic achievement. In addition to courses in textiles and in apparel design, she taught the departmental core course required of all students in the College. Attentive students were treated to a cultural richness and a joy in learning and living. She was responsible for a well-equipped textile laboratory.

In 1938, Gladys and Ferd purchased the historical home of John McGraw on 8 Library Street in Dryden, about ten miles from the campus. Built in 1835, this Greek Revival style house had a two story central core with one story sections flanking the north and south sides and beautiful grounds. John McGraw, the donor of McGraw Hall at Cornell, was the father of Jennie McGraw Fiske, who gave Cornell its first set of chimes now in Library Tower, also the Southworth Library in Dryden in memory of her Mother, Rhoda Southworth. Ferd and Gladys were always active supporters of this library, Ferd serving on the Board and keeping the clock wound. Together they studied the history of their home which looked out on the Library. They renovated it in the original style. They opened its doors to colleagues and to their students who absorbed the hospitality, the perfection of the Greek proportions inside and out, the carefully selected library, the art, music, pottery shop in the barn, and the Franklin stove in the kitchen so often the center of lively conversations. A treasured memory is Cinnamon the cat picking his way among colored glasses in the dining room window. Some of these glasses dated back to Rembrandt's time, and were hand carried from the Netherlands in one of Gladys and Ferd's frequent travels.

The interest in travel to Europe and Asia continued into retirement. Boats were a life-long passion, including ocean liners, tramp steamers, sailboats and power boats on Lake Cayuga and in the San Juan Islands where Ferd's historical investigations and sketching and Gladys's pottery making could continue. Winters were frequently spent on the island of Penang in Malasia.

Among the many contributions of Professor Gladys Butt to New York State and to Cornell University, it should be noted that Professor Butt's pursuit of science and textiles provided a base for the future of those areas of specialization in what is now the reorganized Department of Textiles and Apparel in the New York State College of Human Ecology.

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