

TRIBUTE

Dartmouth's First Woman of Science

One of Dartmouth's greatest unsung heroes passed away in August at the age of 94. Unsung because although she was the first female faculty member at Dartmouth to receive tenure, she worked at Dartmouth for almost 30 years before even being appointed to the position of assistant professor.

The irony is that Hannah Croasdale was ahead of her time. When she earned her Ph.D. in biology from the University of Pennsylvania in 1935, women were not allowed to study Latin or to take laboratory classes with men. Yet, having taught herself Latin, she became renowned for translating descriptions of new species of algae. She was an internationally recognized phy-
cologist, scientific illustrator, and a founder of the Phycological Society of America. In 1952 she received one of the first National Science Foundation grants awarded to a Dartmouth faculty member.

When I met Hannah in 1976, she had been retired for five years but was still energetically teaching her popular course in field biology and taking students to nearby lakes and streams to collect algal specimens. For me, Hannah stood out as one of the few female faculty members on a campus not yet hospitable to women. To many of us, she was both an extraordinary scientific mentor and a dear friend. She believed in her students and showed us that it is possible to pursue a career that you love.

Her abilities were countless. She was the first (and until recently, the only) woman on the Hanover Fire Department. She was a carpenter, woodswoman, organic gardener, and poet. She usually built her own field sampling equipment. In later years, she invented numerous devices to help her live an independent life. She didn't let age stop her. Even in her eighties she never hesitated to bring a snorkel along when visiting friends at a nearby lake.

For all she accomplished, Hannah never considered herself worthy of praise. She had other things on her mind. She filled her life with people and the work she loved. She was a woman of true integrity, generosity, and intelligence who approached life with an earthy humbleness and a sense of humor. She didn't let the inequities she faced bother her. She didn't think of herself as a "woman in science." She simply went about being a scientist. She truly was ahead of her time.

—CELIA CHEN '78, PH.D. '94

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A young Hannah Croasdale, left, at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. She was a mentor to Dartmouth's first generation of women scientists.



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