

VIRGINIA HILTON ROLLER GRASTY, A EULOGY

What must it have been like to have been the only girl who lived on the AMA campus with all those puerile cadets in the late 1920's and early 1930's?

If you look through the yearbooks from that time, you will see that Hilton was the sponsor of many cadet activities and from her collection of dance invitations and dance cards it would appear that she didn't miss an AMA dance set for perhaps eight or more years. I was with her a few years ago and she showed me her collection of dance cards which she had considered donating to the AMA Museum. But, she said, "No, there are too many memories here. I can look at each card and be carried back to that particular dance and that particular boy." She closed the scrapbook and said, "No, I just can't break up the set."

Hilton told me that one day her father, Colonel Tom Roller, AMA's Headmaster, came home to find her tied to a tree. I never got all of the story but it seemed that some cadets had dropped by for something to eat. After getting some cookies and then, out of her mother's sight, the frolicsome cadets had lashed her to a tree for her Dad to find when he walked home from his office in Big Barracks. And did she tell Colonel Tom who had tied her up? No, indeed!

You have to wonder what would have happened had Hilton been a man instead of a woman. She was so strong in so many admirable ways, but when she lost, first, her mother and then her father in a short span of time, I think she could not see a way to stay involved directly with AMA. That was nearly 60 years ago at a time when a woman was still, first, a wife, and when the "Rosie the Riveter" experiences of the early 1940's were being viewed as anomalies of wartime. I could tell in talking with her that she really missed being more involved with AMA after her father's

death, but she had concluded that she did not have any obvious role to play.

So, did her ardor for Augusta wane? I don't think it was diluted in the least measure. Her eyes would light up and that unique and captivating smile would fill her face when the subject turned to AMA. I only saw that same delight when she talked about her loving family or the UVA football team!

When efforts began to create an AMA Museum, Hilton stepped forward not once but on many occasions with patronage and advice. In 2002, a plaque was dedicated in her honor, a tribute which now hangs in the museum. In 2003, she was awarded an AMA Alumni Medal, the first medal to go to someone not an alumnus or faculty member.

The museum is in the original home of her grandfather who founded AMA just after the Civil War. Here, her father, Colonel Tom, was born and here she played as a child. From Colonel and Mrs. Roller's beautiful home - Beaumont - to what is now the AMA Museum is but some 200 yards, a path often taken by the young Hilton, a path which led her by the main barracks where one can imagine cadet heads poking out of every window.

Here was a lady. One who had no doubt about what was right and what was proper, and was not afraid to say so. Virginia remarked on the day of her death that she had never heard her Mother whine or complain as illness gradually but inexorably overcame her remarkable vigor and energy.

She will be missed. By her dear brother, Tommy. By her daughter, her dedicated son-in-law and her grandchildren. By her friends and acquaintances. By everyone who ever walked across the Parade Ground at the little military school she loved

so much.

Henry Scott Holland, the Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral wrote:

"Death is nothing at all.

I have only slipped away into the next room.

Whatever we were to each other, that we still are.

Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed.

Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.

Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?

I am but waiting for you,

Somewhere very near,

Just around the corner,

All is well."

Eulogy written by Bob Bradford '50