

Blanche Wheeler Moyer Hendrickson

Today we are honoring our Organizing Regent, Blanche Wheeler Moyer Hendrickson. I would like to tell you about Blanche, her life, and her achievements.

Born to John W. Moyer and Harriet Wheeler on March 21, 1890, in Jersey Shore, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, a small community located north and slightly west of Scranton. Evidence suggests Blanche was an only child in a busy, intellectual home. Her mother was educated at Williamsport College and privately. She was a member of the Presbyterian Church, Society of Magna Carta Dames, Society of Colonial Dames, Daughters of the American Revolution (listed in Lineage Book: NSDAR: Volume 063 as Mrs. Harriet Wheeler Moyer and is a descendant of at least 2 Revolutionary patriots), and American Pen Women, as well as being active in local clubs and participating in worthy causes and active Republican politics. She also was one of the chairs of the Liberty Loan Committees in Philadelphia and sold over \$10 million in Liberty Bonds. Blanche's father was a teacher and held a law degree. He taught at Williamsport Business College, Muncy Normal School, was Principal of Jersey Shore High School for 5 years resigning that position to study law. Moving back to Williamsport to begin his law practice he was called to Philadelphia, liked the prospects, and made teaching his life's work. He was also active in his church being a Trustee and Elder for 34 years, President of Camera Club, and a public lecturer in Philadelphia and New York. Thus was the foundation that Blanche received in her home as she grew to adulthood.

Blanche attended both Cornell University and Columbia University and graduated with Bachelor and master's degrees. She had a good education which she used during her life. In college she met Albert "Bert" Wilbur Hendrickson. They were married in Philadelphia on June 21, 1915, moved to New York where Bert was an attorney. They lived in New York, Yonkers, and Brooklyn, until moving to Florida after suffering an embolism in 1938 while on vacation. Her doctors said she would never use her left hand or walk again. She and Bert moved to Bradenton, Florida, and within 2 years she was walking.

In 1940, Blanche's parents both passed away in their home in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania. Their deaths were within 6 days of each other. They had left her a legacy of civic responsibility and philanthropy in addition to a lifelong pursuit of learning. We can only imagine how she felt with her own recent health problems and recovery.

Blanche traveled abroad frequently during her life making 2 trips around the world, visiting Europe 17 times and visited every continent except Australia.

In 1936, she spent a month in Paris as a guest of the French government for the Paris Exposition and she was the only female to serve at that Exposition! She was Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Consumer Interest for the New York World's Fair in 1939. She wrote a consumer interest column with tips on cooking during the rationing days of WWII. In addition to all of this work, Bert was building his practice in Bradenton, and they led a busy, active life. Blanche was following in her mother's footsteps with philanthropic work, civic duties, fund raising, while supporting her husband as an attorney and keeping her home. She and Bert owned 4 different properties in Bradenton at different times moving from West 25th Street to Point Pleasant area of 18th Street NW to 2 different homes on Palma Sola Blvd. All of the properties are in use today. Their last home together on Palma Sola Blvd is a lovely and desirable home. Each home was larger than the last as their social and civic life thrived. All this time Blanche was busy using her education by wisely investing in the stock market and parlayed \$39,000. to \$500,000.00 and pursuing her personal interests while supporting her husband in his career.

Here is a timeline of some of her activities.

- 1936 only female to serve Paris Exposition
- 1939 Board Member of New York World's Fair; Chairman Consumer Interest
- 1938-1940 President Bradenton Women's Club
- 1940-1941 President, TB and Health Assoc. of Manatee Co.
- 1941 State Director, TB and Health Assoc. of Manatee Co.
- 1948 1st Vice President & Membership Chair Manatee Players
- 10/19/1951-6/5/1955 Founder & President, Manatee Memorial Hospital Auxiliary: 15,000-hour pin; Hospital dedicated patio to her 8/11/1954
- 6/4/1955 Director, Manatee Hospital Public Relations
- 1962 Named one of the top influential women in Bradenton by Bradenton Herald
- 1963 Donated Blue Chip stock worth approximately \$103,000 to Manatee Technical College to build the Neel Auditorium; that is the equivalent of \$857,684 in 2022.
- She set up a trust to control the expenditures of her donation and added the condition that the auditorium be named Sam R. Neel Auditorium. When the Manatee County Commission approved the plans to build, they set the name to be the Dr. Samuel R. Neel auditorium. Blanche was not happy and is quoted as saying "The trust agreement says Sam Neel period, and if it isn't, I get my money back." I am not sure who backed down, but the money stayed in the trust and the auditorium was built and is now the Neel Auditorium. That's Blanche!

- 1965-1967 Publicity Chair, Manatee County Chamber of Commerce-first women to hold that office
- 3/17/1972 Manatee County Distinguished Citizen Award; her footprints were cast in cement and can be viewed on the east side of the courthouse in downtown Bradenton
- 10/20/1972 Presidential Commendation from President Richard Nixon
- 11/1/1970 Honorary Member, Manatee County Chamber of Commerce
- 6/16/1974 First Lady, General Federation of Women's Clubs

DAR activities

- 1941-1943 Regent Osceola Chapter
- 1951-1953 Organizing Regent Manatee Chapter
- 1972-1973 Regent Manatee Chapter
- FL State National Defense, American Red Cross, Advancement of Music, State Programs

Other activities and Awards

- Distinguished Service Award
- American Red-Cross
- President, League of Women Voters
- Director, Palma Sola Park Association
- Director, Chamber of Commerce
- Director, Manatee County Youth Center
- Chairman of Advisory Board, Manatee Co. Welfare Dept.
- Manatee Representative, Florida State Welfare Board

Named: 1940 New York Women of Achievement
Principal Women of America

Degrees: Bachelor and Master of Arts and Sciences, Cornell, and Columbia Universities

Journalism: New York Herald Tribune, The Delineator, The Pictorial Review, Consumer's Magazine

Author: National Consumer News, McCall's Magazine and Good Housekeeping Magazine, Bradenton Herald

Two Cookbooks copies were donated to Manatee County Agricultural Museum

She and her husband Bert were instrumental in raising funds to build the new Manatee Veterans Memorial Hospital in the 1950's. Bert was elected Chairman of the Board and served in that capacity until June of 1956 when he resigned just before his term was to expire in July. He went on a long vacation by himself citing a need for solitude, peace, and quiet. In

December 1956, they were quietly divorced, and Bert never returned to this area. Shortly thereafter Blanche sold her property in Palma Sola on the bay and moved into an apartment at the Bradenton Cabana, a former motor court turned into a facility with apartments. After many changes of owners and remodels, we know it today as Westminster Condos on Main Street. As you can see from the list of her activities and awards, she remained busy and led a full life and continued her personal interests for several years. In 1972 she agreed to accept the Regent position with Manatee Chapter of NSDAR and served for 2 years. She was still active with the Manatee BPW and was co-chair with Mrs. Elizabeth Dyson of the fund-raising committee for the chapter's donation for the purchase of equipment for the Scholarship House BPW of Florida had purchased in Tallahassee at University of Florida for college girls. The local BPW had raised \$1,500.00 for the \$40,000.00 mortgage. The mortgage paid off and was burned at the state convention. Blanche was a member of the original committee for the Scholarship House Foundation.

By 1975 Blanche had purchased and was living in her condo at 104 Riverview. In May 1975 Manatee Technical College hung her portrait in the lobby of Neel Auditorium. As can happen to all of us, her health had begun to get worse, and she was mostly retired.

In 1979, due to incompetency from old age, guardians were appointed to look after her. The costs of her care quickly escalated to nearly \$50,000.00 annually. Eventually she was placed in a nursing home and required a trustee to manage her finances. Her apartment/condo on Riverview was sold by her trustees. She had outlived the money she had set aside for her care and was nearing destitution. On July 26, 1975, the Bradenton Herald published an editorial "Our Viewpoint". The editorial began "Blanche Hendrickson has lived too long. More accurately, she has outlived her financial resources". Her apartment had been sold and her furnishings were also being sold by her trustee at Ellis First National Bank. Another article was titled "Debt of Gratitude" and was asking for the people of Manatee County to give back some of the love and assistance she has so generously lavished on her adopted home. On October 29, 1983, staff writer Christopher Clarke of the Bradenton Herald reported that only \$100.00 had been collected so far. Not long after that article, five local residents contributed money to assist her. The total was \$100,000. donated for her care. Her Final Will detailed how any remaining money was to be disbursed. There was less than \$20,000 in her account. After expenses and small bequests, there was a very small amount that went to the Manatee Technical School. All of her awards, plaques, and her portrait went to the school also. Her good works continued even after her death February 21, 1985.

Her Last Will and Testament directed that there be no memorial service, that she be cremated, and her ashes spread over and in her beloved Palma Sola Bay. To my knowledge those wishes were fulfilled. I hope Blanche is looking down on us and is pleased.

In researching the life and careers of Blanche Moyer Hendrickson, I find myself wishing I had known this remarkable lady. She a product of the times, a woman before her time, had wonder full parents, deep faith, and a determination to live life to the fullest. She was really no different that many other women except that she showed a determination to succeed at all odds and kept going when told she could not. What would she think of our phone in our purse, our laptop computers with the ability to see our friends on another continent or hold meetings without leaving our homes, the International Space Station, the many, many changes to women's rights, and acceptance of lifestyles not ever spoken about in her youth, the changing environment (yes, she read about ecology!). She was well educated with a Bachelor of Arts from Cornell in 1913 and subsequently, a master's degree from Columbia. She was a proud, intensely private person who also lived in the public eye, and she had outlived all her close relatives and many, many friends, and her money.

Her Quaker faith guided her life. She was friendly with people all over the world and in all walks of life, generous of her time and money, contributing large sums to many needy causes, industrious and hardworking, chairing many fund raising committees and usually succeeding, and talented, having written a poem that was used in a passenger show on one of her cruises, and 2 cookbooks, columns found in local and national magazines and newspapers. Check out newspapers.com for her columns and find copies of McCall's and Good Housekeeping for her pieces in them. She cared about people and projects, hosting many functions in her home and various venues in and around Manatee County and Bradenton and even hosting her sister-in-law and her husband in her home shortly after her marriage ended. She had a lifelong desire to learn and subscribed to a wide variety of publications on many subjects. One I found particularly interesting was a magazine about ecology! That desire to learn was given freely to the little 4-year-old girl asking for more books from her teacher father. He agreed to buy more book on 1 condition, for every fiction book she read she had to read 2 nonfiction books. At 4 years of age! And she organized our chapter of NSDAR in 1951, was our Organizing Regent and returned from retirement in 1972 as Regent for 2 more years.

"A Quaker is someone who is seeking to be faithful to the deepest truth that we can encounter, to be guided to that truth by the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, by the presence of God in our lives, and by the understanding that that's a real experience that we can encounter."

Quote from quaker.org

I wish I had met Blanche Moyer Hendrickson.

The information in this presentation was found in the files of the Manatee Chapter, NSDAR, and the Bradenton Herald at newspapers.com.

It has been my pleasure and honor to work with our regent, Kathy Doddridge, gathering this information. Kathy was the "legs" and spent countless hours searching for information and locating Blanche's footprints and her portrait. Thank You Kathy. Assistance also came from Manatee Technical College now known as Manatee State College of Florida and their library.