In Memoriam

University at Albany
State University of New York
May 9, 1990

Vivian Hopkins

1909-1989

On August 15, Robert Andersen and Wallace Taylor, emerti of the School of Education, Leo Toomajian, her attorney and friend, and I carried Vivian Hopkins' coffin to her family burial plot in Oakwood Cemetery, Troy. She would have been 80 years old on September 2, but she had died August 11.

I had known Vivian since 1941 when, as a sixteen year old freshman, I was a student in her English 1B Speech class, one of the three English courses required in those years of all students at New York State College for Teachers, Albany. She was an attractive, thin young woman with a sharp nose, eyeglasses that she liked to remove whenever pictures were taken, and the slimmest of ankles. Her eyes darted constantly, taking in details in the background and the foreground; it used to fascinate me to watch their rapid movements across the lines of a book or a term paper; she was the most rapid reader I ever knew. In the fifties and sixties, when we were faculty members together, on the train to New York for a conference she would devour a whole mystery novel and start a second. "I think you'll like this one," she would say, and hand me the book as a gift. She was always generous with books (and with the Hershey almond bars she kept in her desk drawer), and she was an avid mystery fan. She once arranged a symposium on detective fiction to be televised on WRGB, then pushed me into chairing it and with adroit comments and questions made Perry Westbrook, then our detective novelist in residence, a laconic early TV performer.

That year, 1941, Vivian's first year on the faculty of the college where she continued to teach as it expanded and underwent the round of changes that culminated in its designation as one of the four University Centers of the State University of New York. Vivian grew in stature along with the college, although it could be argued that because faculty members like Vivian grew in stature, the college grew along with them. As a scholar, Vivian was finally better known and even more highly respected away from home than on her own campus. She corresponded with everyone who was anyone both in Shakespearean and American literary scholarship, from Douglas Bush and Perry Miller to Maynard Mack and William Van O'Connor. Whenever she came across a bit of information, a quotation, a reference that would help someone else's research, she slid a piece of paper into her typewriter, dashed off a note, and sent it on its way. She knew better than to send a handwritten note; as a result of years of rapid note-taking, her fine-pointed scrawl had become as indecipherable as an M.D.'s prescription. She knew that she had to say, when she handed back a batch of exams or term papers, "If you can't make out my comments, bring the paper to my office." And most of the day, her office door stood open; she was available to colleagues and students alike, though she kept the visits short. She was busy all the time,

but she tolerated---rather than welcomed—the constant interruptions.

The wartime generation of students know "Miss Hopkins" as teacher of the Stagecraft course, responsible for getting the scenery painted and into place for the Elementary and Advanced Dramatics productions in Page Hall. She pulled on jeans or coveralls and showed students how to climb into the light box and control the rheostats as well as to tighten the canvas on the flats and mix the paint in the right hue before slapping it on. It was not a course she had particularly wanted to teach, but she had a background in play production, and until Paul Bruce Pettit joined Agnes Futterer after the second World War, Vivian kept the scenes set.

Vivian had a background in playwriting as well as play production. She had studied playwriting at the University of Michigan, where in fact she won an Avery Hopwood Award for a play in 1931. When she returned to Ann Arbor to work on her Ph.D., she served from 1939 to 1941 as Assistant to the Director of the Hopwood Awards. Her interest in creative writing of all kinds led to her conducting writing workshops at NYSCT. Among students who pledged allegiance to Vivian for her encouragement and instruction in writing were two who are among the designated Distinguished Alumni of the University at Albany: the late Louise Gunn, Albany poet and creative-writing teacher in the Albany public schools, and Naoshi Koriyama, who studied under both Louise and Vivian before he returned to Japan where he teaches American literature and has published several volumes of poetry. The development of good critics is as vital as the development of good writers; Vivian taught the English department's first course in literary criticism in 1947.

Throughout her teaching career Vivian had two fixed stars, Shakespeare and the American lit survey. In the 1940's her American literature class met in old Richardson Room 20, which spanned the width of the second floor. She must have taught thousands in that course alone. Her Shakespeare class was nearly as popular, even before there was a Shakespeare requirement for English majors. Like the Bard, she was a gifted punster, and she loved wit wherever she found it. She was fond of skits and parodies. She was not the kind of polished lecturer that Agnes Futterer and Harry Hastings were. Some of her lectures could be quite perfunctory; eventually I understood why. I came to realize that she was harried a great deal of the time. In the 1940's and on into the 1950's faculty members in the English department taught as many as six different classes each semester. Vivian put upon herself the additional responsibility for a great deal of scholarship and writing that were not course-related. Her study of Emerson's aesthetic theory, Spires of Form (published by Harvard University Press in 1951), with all the reading that went into it, was not the offshoot of a course she taught. She did not set up new courses to fit with the subject of her personal scholarship. Her fascination with the Baconians and with American bluestockings led to her masterly biography of Delia Bacon, Prodigal Puritan

(1957) tells interestingly of 19th century intellectual cross-fertilization and female education in addition to tracing Delia's life. Ideas for essays sometimes grew out of her teaching; she was never without a subject that made her fingers tingle with the writer's itch. She published essays on Arthur Miller and Robert Frost, whom she knew personally and admired. She had a grand vision of the importance of Frances Bacon on the development of American thought between 1800 and 1865. DeWitt Clinton became one of her consuming interests. But she could pore over Dutch records and come up with a piece for a library bulletin, or she could study her own family history and find a publisher for a booklet on her forebears. In the 1970's she could not find a publisher for her book MS on Clinton, and she lacked the patience to rework the material. For whatever reason, she laid down her pen firmly and finally, and brought the MS to the University Library.

Frances Bacon warns scholars that marriage and children give "hostages to fortune". Vivian never married, but she had no opportunity for the single-minded scholarly life that Bacon recommended. When her day at the University ended, she was a single woman with a family to look after. She lived in Lansingburgh in one of the great many-roomed mansions near the Hudson. Her brother Richard and her parents required increasing amounts of time and attention. In the late 1940's Vivian would occasionally invite a group of her favorite students—they didn't have to be A students — for dinner with her family. Almost always those evenings included a song-fest gathered around Vivian at the piano. She was fond of Gilbert and Sullivan, loved musical comedies, and bought the hit songs from *Brigadoon* and others as soon as they were published.

I suppose the scene I've been sketching—professor invites undergraduates to dinner with her family and entertains them at the piano—must seem quaint and certainly unlikely to be emulated today. It was part of Vivian's value system, traditional and conservative. She loved social occasions of all kinds. With Coke and cookies, she made the final session of a class into a party, sometimes insisting on having the author of the best paper submitted in the course read it aloud. She believed in recognition of merit, even if it embarrassed the author of the best paper or the best exam. It was a good practice, I think; many of her best students were the department's best students, even the college's best. She knew how to praise, and her praise encouraged many. Some of her favorite students kept in touch with her even decades after their last class with her. Naoshi Koriyama made an effort to call on her every time he came back to the United States. No Alumni Day goes by without someone asking me, "How's Miss Hopkins? What's become of her?"

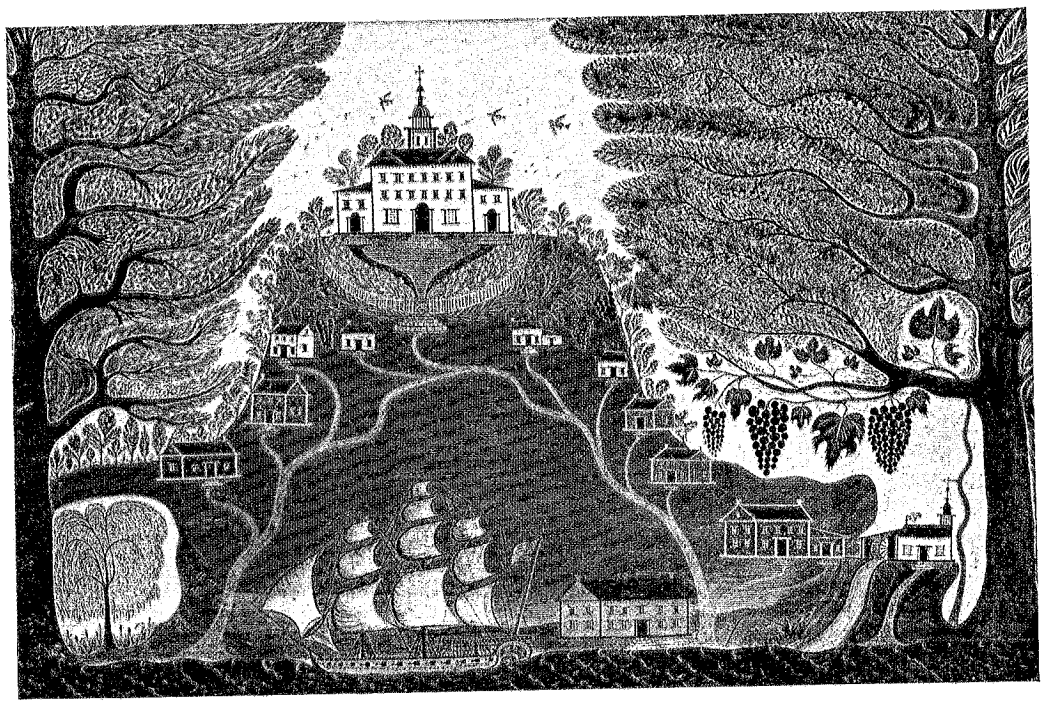
This year we're celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Woodstock. It's also the twentieth anniversary of the most troubled days on university campuses across the country. With student strikes, massive absences from class, and grades awarded without final exams, Vivian questioned what lay ahead of her. Her invalid brother Richard had died, her mother (in her last years an invalid

also) died, and two years later her father. Teaching had become a very different profession from what it had been when she made her way after Wellesley and Michigan through a series of secondary school positions. She had taken a second M.A. at Radcliffe and finally her Ph.D. at Michigan, and then found her niche at the State University at Albany. She looked about her and the very fabric of society seemed to have been rent. One day she told me that if she retired, her retirement annuity and her family income would match her university salary. The unpleasantness that faculty factions were creating in the department and across the campus discouraged her. Abruptly and without fanfare, she retired in 1973. The family gravel company kept her busy for a few years. Then her remaining brother, John, died, and then his widow. Running the gravel company gave her a kind of satisfaction—it was another thing she had proved that she could do, without enrolling in the ranks of feminists. But the University and higher education remained at the center of her consciousness, and when she sold the gravel company, she gave $10,000 to the University to establish the Hopkins Scholarship in the English department. She knew the importance of such awards. She had herself won not just the Hopwood award but an American Association of University Women fellowship and a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship (1956-57). She had been offered a Fulbright professorship in Poland, but the hardships of Polish life in the 1960's, and her lack of the language, kept her from accepting it.

Vivian's final years were lived quietly in Troy. Alone in the huge house filled with memories, she finished the last of her pamphlets on her family history and laid her pen down for good. Even correspondence went unanswered. She had always been active in county and local historical societies, including the Albany Institute of History and Art; she went through the house and donated many items. Friends who came to call left with at least one book from her extensive library. A few old friends kept in touch with her, and she came to depend heavily upon her friend and attorney, Leo Toomajian. Eventually the house was sold and she moved to the Troy Memorial Adult Home, where she spent her final months.

The interest that accumulates annually from her gift of $10,000 still provides the only substantial scholarship the English department offers to an outstanding undergraduate. For this gift and for her dedication and devotion throughout thirty years of teaching, Vivian Hopkins deserves a moment of recognition and remembrance from the whole of the University community.

—Arthur N. Collins



Dear Vivian:

I bought this card at the Met. Museum for you because I thought it might remind you of the fine one which you sent me last year- Edward Hick's Peaceable Kingdom - of virtually the same era, perhaps a little earlier. It amuses me and also gives me the feeling that the Spirit of the Plantation is well expressed. And upon it I am wishing you a Happy Christmas Season and a fine New Year when 1968 rolls around. Many thanks for your beautiful card of this year - fine in composition and lovely in its color harmony. I shall keep it.

Affectionately, Ruth

P.O. Box 613
Lenox, MA 01240-0613
October 19, 1989

Office of University Archives
University Library
The University at Albany
Albany, NY 12222

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am enclosing a copy of some reminiscences inspired by the recent death of Professor Vivian C. Hopkins. I have sent them to the editor of The Carillon, to the Vice-President for University Affairs, and to the English Department. I send them to you so that if some question should some day arise as to who Vivian Hopkins was, there will at least be the possibility of more than a perfunctory answer.

Sincerely yours,

Arthur N. Collins
Professor Emeritus, English
Class of 1948, NYSCT

"MISS HOPKINS": VIVIAN AS I REMEMBER HER

Arthur N. Collins, Class of 1948, Professor Emeritus

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who was anyone in Shakespearean and American literary scholarship, from Douglas Bush and Oscar Campbell to Perry Miller, Norman Holmes Pearson, Leon Edel, and William Van O'Connor. Whenever she came across a bit of information, a quotation, a reference that would help someone else's research, she slid a piece of paper into her typewriter, dashed off a note, and sent it on its way. She knew better than to send a handwritten note; as a result of years of rapid note-taking, her fine-pointed scrawl had become as indecipherable as an M.D.'s prescription. She knew that she had to say, when she handed back a batch of exams or term papers, "If you can't make out my comments, bring the paper to my office." And most of the day, her office door stood open; she was available to colleagues and students alike, though she kept the visits short. She was busy all the time, but she looked up and welcomed the visitor. She never complained, even though she may have dreaded--rather than welcomed-- the interruptions themselves.

The wartime generations of students knew "Miss Hopkins" as teacher of the Stagecraft course, responsible for getting the scenery painted and into place for the Elementary and Advanced Dramatics productions in Page Hall. She pulled on jeans or coveralls and showed students how to climb into the light box and control the rheostats as well as to tighten the canvas on the flats and mix the paint in the right hue before slapping it on. It was not a course she had particularly wanted to teach, but she had a background in play production, and until Paul Bruce Pettit appeared on the scene after the second World War, she kept the scenes set.

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schools, and Naoshi Koriyama, who studied under both Louise and Vivian before he returned to Japan, where he teaches American literature and has published several volumes of poetry. The development of good critics is vital to the development of good readers, good writers, and good teachers; in 1947 Vivian taught the first course in literary criticism offered in the English Department.

Throughout her teaching career Vivian had two fixed stars, Shakespeare and the American lit survey. In the 1940's her American literature class met in old Richardson Room 20, which spanned the width of the second floor. She must have taught thousands in that course alone. Her Shakespeare class was nearly as popular, even before there was a Shakespeare requirement for English majors. She was an atrocious punster, and she loved wit wherever she found it. She was not the kind of polished lecturer that Agnes Futterer and Harry Hastings were. Some of her lectures could be quite perfunctory; eventually I understood why. I came to realize that she was harried a great deal of the time. In the 1940's and on into the 1950's faculty members in the English department taught as many as six different classes each semester. Vivian put upon herself the additional responsibility for a great deal of scholarship and writing that were not course related. Her study of Emerson's aesthetic theory, Spires of Form (published by Harvard University Press in 1951), with all the reading that went into it, was not the offshoot of a course she taught. She did not set up new courses to fit with the subject of her personal scholarship. Her fascination with the Baconians (those who think Shakespeare was too much a bumpkin to have written the plays they attribute to Bacon) and with American bluestockings led to her masterly biography of Delia Bacon. Prodigal Puritain (1957) tells interestingly of nineteenth-century intellectual cross-fertilization and female education in addition to tracing Delia's life. Ideas for essays sometimes grew out of her teaching; she was never without a subject that made her fingers tingle with the writer's itch. She wrote essays on Arthur Miller and Robert Frost, whom she knew personally and admired. She had a grand vision of the importance of Frances Bacon on the development of American thought between 1800 and 1865. De Witt Clinton became one of her consuming interests. But she could pore over Dutch records and come up with a piece for a library bulletin, or she could study her own family history and find a publisher for

a booklet on her forebears. In the 1970's, however, she could not find a publisher for her book on Clinton, and she lacked the patience to rework the material along the lines some editors suggested. For whatever reason, she laid down her pen firmly and finally, and brought the manuscript to the University Library.

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I suppose the scene I've been sketching--professor invites undergraduates to dinner with her family and entertains them at the piano--must seem quaint and certainly unlikely to be emulated in 1989. It was part of Vivian's value system, traditional and conservative. She loved social occasions of all kinds. With coke and cookies, she made the final session of a class into a party, sometimes insisting on having the author of the best paper submitted in the course read it aloud. She believed in recognition of merit, even if it embarrassed the author of the best paper or the best exam. It was a good practice, I think; many of her best students were the department's best students, even the college's best. She knew how to praise, and her praise encouraged many. Some of her favorite students kept in touch with her even decades after their last class with her. No Alumni Day goes by without someone asking me, "How's Miss Hopkins? What's become of her?"

This year we are celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Woodstock. It's also the twentieth anniversary of the most troubled days on university campuses across the country. With student strikes, massive absences from class, and grades awarded without final exams, Vivian questioned what lay ahead for her. Her father had died in 1962 and two years later both her invalid brother Richard and her mother (in her last years an invalid also) died. Teaching had become a very different profession from what it had been when she made her way after Wellesley and Michigan through a series of secondary school positions. She had taken a second M.A. at Radcliffe and finally her Ph.D. at Michigan, and then found her niche at the State University at Albany. She looked about her and the very fabric of society seemed rent. One day she told me that if she retired, her retirement annuity and her family income would match her university salary. The unpleasantness that faculty factions were creating in the department and across the campus disheartened her. Abruptly and without fanfare, she retired in 1973.

Her remaining brother, John, had died in the fall of 1972 and his widow had died in the spring of 1973. Vivian now headed the family gravel company; running it gave her a kind of satisfaction--it was another thing she had proved that she could do, without calling herself a feminist. But the University and higher education remained at the center of her consciousness, and when she sold the gravel company, she gave ten thousand dollars to the University to establish the Hopkins Scholarship in the English department. She knew the importance of such awards. She had herself won not just the Hopwood award but an American Association of University Women fellowship and a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship (1956-57). She was offered a Fulbright professorship in Poland (at the request of a Polish scholar), but the hardships of Polish university life in the sixties kept her from accepting it.

Vivian was a loyal member of the Modern Language Association and its American Literature group. Throughout her teaching years, she attended the annual MLA conference whenever it met in New York City. She early became a regular member of the English Institute, which met originally at Columbia University and later on the Harvard- Radcliffe Campus. These smaller meetings were her favorites; everyone knew everyone else in the

early years, and discussion and even argument were as important as the papers given. Vivian had a facility for spotting newcomers and making them at home, inviting them to her room for a drink of her favorite rye, taking them with her when she went to dinner, introducing them to those she thought might be helpful. It was an extension of her cheerful, good-humored teaching. When she stopped attending these meetings in the mid-seventies, she still continued her support by subscribing to the published volumes of papers.

Vivian's final years were lived quietly in Troy. Alone in the huge house filled with memories, she finished the last of her pamphlets on her family history and, as I said above, laid her pen down for good. Even correspondence went unanswered. She had always been active in county and local historical societies, including the Albany Institute of History and Art; she went through the house and donated many items. She culled her library and urged visitors as they left the house to take along a book. The dramatic inflation of the late 1970's changed her way of life and brought anxieties. A few old friends kept in touch with her, and she came to depend upon her friend and attorney, Leo Toomajian. Eventually the family house was sold and she moved to the Troy Memorial Adult Home, where she spent her final months.

Vivian Hopkins' example of dedication and devotion deserve recognition and remembrance from the whole of the University community. Her many contributions over more than thirty years, including untold hours given to committees and boards, helped the college become the university it is today. Her name will live on in the English Department where the interest from her gift of ten thousand dollars still provides the only substantial scholarship to an outstanding undergraduate. These reminiscences of my teacher, colleague, and friend may, I hope, recall her to those who knew her; to those who never knew her, perhaps they will give meaning to her name.