

Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, pioneer of women's studies, dies at 98

By **Emily Langer**

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Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, an English professor at the University of Maryland who was among the first academics to devote their careers to the study of women's history and literature, died Feb. 10 at a hospice center in Harwood, Md. She was 98.

She had cerebrovascular disease and other ailments, said her daughter, Edith Beauchamp.

Dr. Beauchamp (pronounced Beecham) joined the U-Md. faculty in the 1960s and taught in the English department until her retirement in 1990. She helped found the women's studies program at the university and served as its first coordinator when it was inaugurated in 1973.

"The entire academic establishment is run by men, and they are interested in their experience," Dr. Beauchamp once told The Washington Post. "In their minds, the stories and lives of women are peripheral. That's why you've never heard of half of the books I teach."

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In her research and teaching, she pored over the records left by women who received little if any public attention during their lives but whose diaries, letters and other writings vividly revealed the eras in which they lived.

Her subjects included Anna Ella Carroll, a political pamphleteer who became an adviser to President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, and Zenith Jones Brown, a 20th-century author who wrote dozens of popular detective novels under male noms de plume.

Dr. Beauchamp's publications included the 1987 volume "A Private War: Letters and Diaries of Madge Preston, 1862-1867," a collection of the writings of a Towson, Md., woman during and after the Civil War.

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Don Imus | Don Imus, who spent more than half a century in radio and television skating along the edge of propriety and occasionally falling into the abyss of the unacceptable, died Dec. 27 at a hospital in College Station, Tex. He was 79. In a roller-coaster career in which he grew chummy with prominent politicians, repeatedly got suspended or fired for offensive cracks, abused drugs and touted health foods, Mr. Imus won a loyal following, made millions and transformed himself from a bad-boy DJ into a host whose program became a nearly mandatory stop for presidential candidates. Read the obituary (Richard Drew/AP)

“During this afternoon we all have been as unhappy as well could be, owing to Mr. Preston’s humor which unfortunately for me, fulminated this evening and ended by Mr. Preston striking me to the floor senseless,” the diarist wrote on Feb. 25, 1865. A niece was present, she added, “but of course said nothing!”

“Madge was a battered wife. There can be no question,” Dr. Beauchamp told The Post. “Here we are studying the 19th century and learning about the reaction to Lincoln’s assassination, and discovering the texture of the ordinary woman’s life.”

Virginia Mary Walcott was born in Sparta, Mich., on June 28, 1920. Both her parents were high school teachers and principals, and her father later became a professor at the University of Michigan.

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Dr. Beauchamp studied English at Michigan, where she received a bachelor's degree in 1942 and, after serving with the Red Cross in the Pacific following World War II, a master's degree in 1948. She received a PhD in English from the University of Chicago in 1955.

In the 1960s, she accompanied her then-husband on a Foreign Service assignment to Nigeria, where she helped open what is now the American International School of Lagos, her daughter said.

In addition to her academic work, she worked for more than 50 years on her hometown Greenbelt News Review as a reporter and editor. She was active with the American Association of University Women and received honors including induction into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame.

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Her marriage to George E. Beauchamp Jr. ended in divorce. Survivors include three children, Edith Beauchamp of Greenbelt, Md., John Beauchamp of Baltimore and George W. Beauchamp of New Smyrna Beach, Fla.; five grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

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