

# Profile of a President

By Hamilton Crockford – *Richmond Times Dispatch*  
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*Anne Gary Pannell has just completed her tenth year as president of Sweet Briar College, and in June the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina awarded her an honorary L.L.D. This seems an appropriate time to sum up her work for the college and to review her philosophy of education, which Hamilton Crockford does in this story of her life, from the Richmond Times Dispatch.*

SWEET BRIAR College's president is a woman in love. "I'm in love with the academic life," she professes unabashedly. And it's enough to make the academic life straighten its tie, throw out its chest, and march right out and skewer any Philistines still lurking in the land.

Dr. Anne Gary Pannell is one of only seven or eight presidents of four-year colleges in the United States, aside from the sectarian schools, and the only one in the South. But it's more than that. Dynamos don't usually come 5 feet 2, brown-haired and hazel-eyed. She is one, sparked by compassion and a voracious affection for learning. And there isn't a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles in the house.

She won a bout with polio early. She has done in her share of intellectual bogeymen since.

Mrs. Pannell is historian, an author still writing, fund raiser, world traveler in education's cause, and a widow of 49 who raised two sons to manhood before they owned a car. She calls herself a schoolteacher. International relations is one of her top interests, but in no glib terms. Americans, good-hearted, are naively unaware how complex the problem is, she says. Sweet Briar is going to start a program of Asian studies next fall.



You don't downgrade the intellectual life for women around her. You are reminded: "The standards of morality and excellence and culture of our country will never be higher than women can make the,."

Selecting their teachers she says is her most important and hardest job.

She has more ideas still than she can finance...

And you had certainly best beware of calling this select school with the lovely 3,000 acre campus "fashionable" or "exclusive."

"There's nothing that distresses me so much," she said in an interview. This is "a serious, hard-working college," she said emphatically, and the hazel eyes flashed. "Our girls can hold their own, in earnestness and seriousness and ability to work, with the students of any good college – for men or women."

#### MANY IDEAS

Women presidents are nothing new to this small college a dozen miles above Lynchburg. It's had them from the start in 1906. Mrs. Pannell is the fifth. She'll have been here ten years July 1. She has more ideas for the place still than she can finance.

"But I'm no innovator," she says, "...And I'm not a reformer." No one is less the crusading feminist.

For a work day on the campus she wore a simple gray coat sweater and skirt, white blouse, and a strand of pearls.

Two men always crop up in her talk – her father and husband. And then there are the scholars who fed her zeal for history.

Her sons caught it. Gary Pannell, 22, now in training as a reserve officer, finished Washington and Lee with a major in history last year. He's taken an exam for the foreign service. Clifton W. Pannell, 20, is a University of North Carolina junior in history. To his mother's delight, he wants to teach.

Mrs. Pannell lives in the big yellow brick Sweet Briar House with its twin Italian-style towers flanking an older portion believed to predate the Revolution. It was the home of Mrs. Indiana Fletcher Williams, the widow who willed her estate to start the school as a memorial to her daughter. It looks across a screen of boxwoods onto a boundless view.

Upstairs is a center room lined with books. "This is where we live," the president said. Parts of the scene are Clifton's dog "Champ" and a Siamese cat given Mrs. Pannell and named "Elijah Fletcher: for the father of the founder.

#### RUSHES TO THE LIBRARY

The amount of reading Anne Pannell does, a friend said, "is incredible. When she gets back from a trip, she rushes to the college library to see what's come in since she left. (She may have been gone three days.) She staggers home with an armful of books...."

Mrs. Pannell is a Tar Heel with Virginia roots, and on her tongue a melodious broad "a." Prince George County has its Garysville for her ancestors, who've "lived by the weed for 300 years." She was born Anne Thomas Gary September 15, 1910, in Durham, the only child of Alexander Henry Gary, a tobacconist, and Mrs. Anne Roche Thomas Gary of Botetourt County. They moved to Richmond when the girl was a baby, and shortly to Petersburg, then to New York when she was 8.

She had polio at 8: "I was extremely lucky. I was up within a year. It was partly my mother's courage. She made me exercise..."

Her father, oldest of 12 children, had had to quit college when his father's tobacco factory burned. But he was "one of the most remarkable men. He spent all his spare time taking me to historical places... He loved languages. He found the greatest pleasure in study for the sheer joy of study. He was the antithesis of the organization man..."

In New York they sent her to a private school. It was fine, the student said, except that, "the less said about math, the better. I've never had any adequate training in science and math. There is a great gap in my education. I hope the students who go out from this college today will not have such a lack as I have..."

#### ENDOWED CHAIRS

With gifts given the last four years the college has established endowed chairs of both physics and chemistry, as well as religion, honoring former professors in those fields. The president meanwhile took a 6:30 a.m. television course in physics.

Miss Gary went to Barnard College. She got an A.B. in 1931, was yearbook editor, senior class president, salutatorian, Phi Beta Kappa, medalist in Colonial history, and "fortunate enough to be given a very generous fellowship for European study." She went to Oxford University's St. Hugh's College, which took the American woman for a year. She stayed three years, and did research in the summers in Deville, Paris and London libraries.

"I worked very hard," she said, "because I was young. I had a round face, I looked very unscholarly. Women had only been admitted to Oxford about 10 years. I had to work very hard to convince anyone I had a serious purpose. But I loved every minute of it."

But her mother died shortly after she went. And in the final spring her godfather, a cousin working in London who was "like another father," had a stroke. She left and nursed him for several weeks. She didn't finish her doctoral dissertation.

She did get a job at Alabama College for Women the 1934-35 session. Its president even introduced her to a young University of Alabama professor named Henry Clifton Pannell. And shortly it seems the professor wanted to marry her come summer.

#### WANTED DEGREE

But she thought she owed it to Barnard to get that degree. She went back to Oxford, wrapped up the work in November and took her D. Phil., Oxon.

The thesis was "The Political and Economic Relations of English and American Quakers, 1750-85." The Quakers, she noted, were one of America's closest-knit groups. Many were merchants. They wanted the Empire preserved as the world's most secure trading region. They were also pacifists. "They had a very interesting role, trying to get Britain and American together. I was using them as a peephole to look into America."

Now the Friends Historical Society is reprinting the product. The Liberian government, because of a chapter on slavery, is interested. Doctorals seldom live so long...

And she got back that November, 1935, in time for the Alabama-Vanderbilt football game. The professor was there. She taught again. They married September 2, 1936.

"I was so lucky," she said. They had two children. She stayed home, tried to learn how to cook, taught a Sunday school class, worked with the welfare association..., and had a perfectly adorable house." Her husband's nephew lived with them. They educated him.

War approached, faculty members left, military students came. The university asked her to teach history. She did, from 1939 to 1945.

Her husband, professor of education, had also become superintendent of schools in Tuscaloosa. In 1946 he was elected state superintendent of education. (You campaigned for the job there,) He was to be sworn in on a Monday. He had a heart attack on Sunday, and died.

ASKED HER BACK

The university asked her back. It was a lifesaver since she had to support the children, she said. A year later she was chairman of freshman history, and an associate professor. In 1952 Alabama gave her an L.L.D.

But in 1949 Goucher College in Baltimore made her its dean. The next year she was here. And it was "just like home,"

The good curriculum was one thing that drew her, she said. Sweet Briar had had an honors program since the 1930s. It got a Phi Beta Kappa chapter in 1949.

Since she came it has added those "chairs,": increased the student body from 450 to 530 with a new dorm, got an auditorium and fine arts center rising now. The faculty has done all this, she said, she's only tried to find the money. She's "found" three million dollars in all, they say.

But she counts as the biggest accomplishment an increase in education and psychology offerings and the start of a nursery school, "so we could give good teacher training."

The Asian studies will be a cooperative program with Randolph-Macon Women's College and Lynchburg College. Mrs. Pannell, a member of the scholarship board of the Ford Motor Co. Fund, obtained a \$100,000 Ford Foundation grant for the venture, a staff member noted.

Sweet Briar was already administering the junior-year-in-France program for the United States colleges before Mrs. Pannell got here.

"I would like to see anything that would get more Americans to study languages," she said. "They are the key to our understanding the international situation, ...It's only a dream, but I'd like to see us teach Hindu and Chinese here. I'm a great believer that you should accompany the study of the history of a country with the study of its arts and language.

"There is a delicate balance to working out women's education. I don't believe I have the wisdom to come up with the ideal solution... It's who teaches that counts, finally.

"We are a costly school, but that's because we are poor. We charge because we are determined to maintain the excellence of our faculty. To give established majors in a small school is costly. I would be foolish to tell you that our girls went without their shoes or missed their orange juice for breakfast," she said. But 60 girls are here on scholarships of \$100 to \$1,800. Sweet Briar traditionally has provided tuition free to "hundreds" from its home Amherst County, and even provided books to some.

And "where there is a personal exchange between a gifted teacher and a gifted student, that is where the spark is passed. (If what we need is the creative spirits, I'm not sure the job is going to be done in the large classroom or on T.V.)"

#### CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Sweet Briar's president, a friend noted, calls on its retired professors wherever she is. If a teacher is sick "the first person you see when you come out of the anesthetic is Mrs. Pannell." When low attendance threatened the college's vesper services, she conducted the services.

An Episcopalian, she is a trustee of the Church society for College Work. She is on the national senate of Phi Beta Kappa – and was a 1958 Miss America contest judge. She is on the American Council on Education's committee for institutional projects broad for 1960.

Somehow she's contrived also to complete the manuscript of a book – now being printed – about Julia Strudwick Tutweiler, Alabama's pioneer woman educator and penal reformer. And now she's begun writing another.

With all this, she still manages to do a thing which college presidents say is practically unheard of among them today, tied as they are to the endless task of fund-raising: Every other year, she teaches a class – a semester in Colonial history.

But the woman in love with all this hasn't gone off on a cloud. She clings to this line for educational perspective: "The ideas women teach and the things they discuss around the dinner table...create the community." They need the broadest knowledge, including "the senses of the past," for this.

"I think their greatest role in our society is in the homes as mothers." But also, "there isn't any finer thing, you know, than a good woman doctor or teacher..."

"All the protective roles in life are so important. And the interest in a protective role has to be nurtured in our society... The nurture of the young and the care of the weak," she said, "are still the greatest roles of women."

#### GIVEN HONORARY DEGREE

In June Mrs. Pannell was awarded an honorary degree of doctor of laws at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, "by reason of distinction in service to society." Looking on proudly were her sons and many Sweet Briar alumnae from the Greensboro area.

#### INVITED TO JOIN

At the Alumnae Association annual banquet in June Mrs. Pannell, told that she had won the affection and admiration of the alumnae, was asked to honor them by becoming a member of the Alumnae Association.

"Tonight marks the end of a busy and fruitful decade," said Mrs. Horton in tendering the invitation, "a decade filled with demands upon everyone connected with Sweet Briar, but most of all upon its president. To the anticipated duties of a president, which were never exactly confined to a 40-hour week, were added the colossal demands of the greatest search for funds ever initiated by the college.

"We have seen her bearing responsibilities which most of us encounter only in small fractions, to which she has sacrificed unbelievable amounts of strength and privacy and time with a devotion which never holds back any aid that is hers to give.

"Some of her problems she has shared frankly with alumnae, conferring with their executive committee and with individuals. She has drawn us into greater participation by urging more places for us on the Board of Overseers. She has encouraged the expansion of direct relations between alumnae and college by facilitating the enlargement of the alumnae council and broadening the scope of our program at reunions. This we see," Mrs. Horton concluded, "that there is no group with whom she has warmer relations than with the alumnae, and we can observe with deep pleasure that choice of president made ten years ago."