Marie Lemoine Harrison

We of the University Museum staff are all too sharply reminded by the death of Mrs. Charles C. Harrison, Jr. on August 7, 1966 of the interrelation between the Museum and the Harrison family for nearly seventy-five years. Many of Philadelphia’s leading families, Peppers, Clarks, Coxes, Houstons, and Madeiras, to name a few, have been involved in the founding, construction, and support of the Museum during all these years. But the late Mrs. Harrison’s father-in-law, Charles Custis Harrison, stands out as the man who made it all work. First as Provost of the University and later as President of the Museum, he was principally responsible for raising the large sums of money needed for construction and operation of this unique institution.

After raising a family, Mrs. Harrison took over the enthusiasm of her famous father-in-law for the University Museum in 1944, and as a member of the Women’s Committee, became not only a staunch supporter but a force in the operations and management of the Museum. The Board and the Women’s Committee felt her influence as did also the maintenance staff. One day she would be organizing chamber music concerts in the Egyptian Gallery, and the next refurbishing the Guards’ quarters which most of us had never even seen. She knew everyone and everyone knew her and she had their interests at heart. When her boundless energy was impaired by age and ill health so that she was less often in the Museum, we all kept her posted on what was happening—everything from the personal affairs of the secretaries to the latest plans for field research.

Twenty years ago when I first came to the Museum, Mrs. Harrison took over my education in Philadelphia and Philadelphians and established for me a kind of institution—which was periodic and regular afternoon teas, tête-à-tête at “Chuckswood,” her home in Villanova. They were proper English teas with buttered bread and very carefully brewed tea, but that was then always followed by whiskey and soda as a kind of ritual. Her world, past and present, came alive with some of the most amusing anecdotes I have ever heard. All was punctuated with hearty laughter, and it usually had to do with the foibles of people but never was there the slightest touch of anything small or mean. Mrs. Harrison loved people, understood them, and forgave them for everything except meanness. Perhaps this was in part a result of her deep-seated religious beliefs, and her wide reading about ideas and customs around the world.

Mrs. Harrison always felt a personal responsibility for the Museum and insisted that her friends, whose families were also involved, should feel the same way. I am sure that this has had a subtle but also profound influence upon the institution. Of course, it is her effect upon the Museum which is important, but in writing this farewell I am constantly reminded of the very great mutual affection between us which grew up over the years. This has meant much to me and I am sure that there are many others on the Board of Managers, the Women’s Committee, and the Staff who have the same sense of irreparable loss.

—Froelich Rainey