CASNER, Evelyn (Wiggin). March 1, 1900–November 5, 1964.
Wellesley College (BA 1921), Brown University (MA 1924), University of Chicago (PhD 1936).

Evelyn Prescott Wiggin was born in Stratham, New Hampshire, the elder of two daughters of New Hampshire natives Margaret Prescott (Green) (1871–1905) and George Herbert Wiggin (1864–1948), a farmer. Her parents, neither of whom had attended college, married on December 30, 1896, and her mother died three days after giving birth to their second daughter, Elsie [or Elise] Green Wiggin, in September 1905. Her father remarried in 1908.

Evelyn Wiggin received her early education at Robinson Seminary, a public secondary school in Exeter, New Hampshire, before entering Wellesley College in 1917. While at Wellesley she was a Durant scholar. After her graduation as a mathematics major in 1921, she taught mathematics at the high school in Massena, New York, during 1921–22.

On March 28, 1922, Wiggin received a letter from R. G. D. Richardson at Brown University, who, at the suggestion of "my good friends, Misses [Helen A.] Merrill and [Clara E.] Smith at Wellesley," invited her to apply for a position as a graduate assistant in the department at Brown University (Correspondence 1921–1925, R. G. D. Richardson Papers, Brown University Archives). He wanted someone to assist him half time and indicated that there was also the opportunity to study toward the MA degree. He noted that there were usually four or five students studying for master's degrees each year, half of whom were women – chiefly from Women's College, Brown. Wiggin entered Brown in 1922 and was to serve as Richardson's assistant, which involved reading papers and keeping department records; she also was to teach a section of students who had entered with only one year of algebra. In addition, for an extra stipend, she was to teach a class of girls deficient in algebra during the first semester and those deficient in plane geometry during the second semester. Two years later, in 1924, she completed her master's degree having taken work mainly with Richardson and Raymond Clare Archibald.

Wiggin was an instructor of mathematics at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, from September 1924 until June 1927. On October 16, 1924, in reply to a note from her, Richardson wrote, "I know that you will not forget the intellectual ideal which inspired you to go on with graduate work" (Richardson Correspondence 1921–1925). Richardson continued to encourage Wiggin to pursue the study of mathematics. On October 9, 1925, after she reported to him on extra duties at Hood because of illness of a colleague's mother, duties that resulted in twenty-one hours of teaching and looking after the department, he wrote, "If you care to take some course for credit *in absentia* here at Brown, I think it could be arranged. I know you will want to keep on with your studies in some sort of way. Possibly you can go to Chicago some summer" (Richardson Correspondence 1921–1925). Wiggin left Hood College in 1927 to enter the University of Chicago for further graduate work. She was first there for two years, as a teaching fellow in her second year, 1928–29, working mainly with Gilbert Ames Bliss.

In 1929 Wiggin joined the faculty of Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, as an associate professor. (The college was renamed Randolph College and became coeducational in 2007.) Except for leaves she remained at

Randolph-Macon the rest of her career. Gillie Larew was also on the faculty, although in Wiggin's first year there, Larew was on leave to study with Carathéodory in Munich. In a letter to Bliss of March 31, 1931, Larew commented about Wiggin: "I want to thank you again for sending us Miss Wiggin and express the hope that we may keep her for a long, long time. She is everything she should be both as teacher and as a person. We have managed to do a little reading together and hope to do more, when she has her thesis and examination off her hands . . . " (University of Chicago. Department of Mathematics. Records, Box 1, Folder 8, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library). Wiggin returned to the University of Chicago and was in residence 1935–36 when she finished her dissertation in the calculus of variations; she was awarded the PhD in 1936. She returned to Randolph-Macon and then was promoted to full professor in 1941.

Wiggin was on leave and was a lecturer at Wellesley College during 1942–43 and taught at Emory University in summer 1949. In December of 1951 she attended a computing laboratory seminar at the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies. In the summer of 1953 she attended the first of the recently founded (1950) National Science Foundation's summer institutes in mathematics, this held at the University of Colorado for college teachers. The following summer she attended another NSF institute at the University of North Carolina. During 1954–55 she was on leave and studied at the University of Chicago.

On June 20, 1956, Evelyn Wiggin married Sidney Casner, a retired lawyer, in Chicago. Casner was born in 1890, grew up in Chicago, had degrees from the University of Illinois and Kent College of Law, and attended the University of Chicago Law School. He had practiced law and taught social sciences in Hyde Park High School in Chicago. He also had taught in the DePaul University College of Law and the Kent College of Law in Chicago. From July 1945 to August 1947, he was in Europe, where he served as a military judge and taught at army university centers in England, France, and Germany. According to a 1966 graduate of Randolph-Macon, Sidney Casner had died by September 1962.

After her marriage, Evelyn Wiggin Casner continued in her position at Randolph-Macon. For eight weeks during the summer of 1957, she was at Stanford on a grant from the Social Sciences Research Council studying applications of mathematics to the social sciences. Based on this work she developed an experimental course for social science students at Randolph-Macon. During the late 1950s and early 1960s she taught in seven NSF summer institutes for high school teachers.

Although Casner was reportedly a very shy person, she held leadership positions in various organizations on campus and in Lynchburg. For example, she was president of the college faculty club and local chapters of Sigma Xi and AAUP. She was also exceedingly active in the community. Soon after her arrival in Virginia, she was president of the Lynchburg Consumer Cooperative 1932–40. She was involved with the YWCA, and over many years served as president (1958–62), trail supervisor, and council member of the local Appalachian Trail Club. She was also a member of the Virginia Academy of Science.

Evelyn Wiggin Casner died in Charlottesville, Virginia, at age sixty-four in 1964. The Evelyn Casner Memorial Award was established by the Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club to be presented to the club member who logged the most miles during a year on hikes scheduled by the club.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, NCTM, AAAS, Sigma Delta Epsilon, AAUW, AAUP, Phi Beta Kappa.

Dissertation:

1936 [Wiggin, E. P.] A boundary value problem of the calculus of variations. PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, directed by Gilbert Ames Bliss and William Thomas Reid. Typescript. Private edition, 1937, distributed by the University of Chicago Libraries, reprinted from *Contributions to the Calculus of Variations, 1933–37*, 243–75.

Publications:

1937 [Wiggin, E. P.] A boundary value problem of the calculus of variations. In *Contributions to the Calculus of Variations, 1933–37*, 243–75. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 63.0483.03 (H. Boerner); *Zbl* 017.36203 (L. M. Graves). Review of volume: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 44:604–09 (A. Dresden).

1945 [Wiggin, E.] The value of mathematics in a liberal education. *Math. Mag.* 19:418.

References to: AmMSc 5–8, 9P–11P; AmWom 1935–40; WhoAmW 3.

Obituary. *Lynchburg News*, 6 Nov 1964.

Other sources: PhD dissertation vita 1936; Owens questionnaires 1937, 1940; Brown University Archives (R. G. D. Richardson Papers); Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library (Department of Mathematics, Records); Wellesley College Alumnae Office; Wiggin Memorial Library, Stratham, NH; communication with Carol Wood, student at Randolph-Macon 1962–66; "The Virginia Hiker: Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club: 1930–1990"; US Census 1900, 1920, 1930 NH, 1930 IL.

Last modified: March 6, 2009.