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TAPPAN, Helen. October 22, 1888–November 10, 1971.

WESTERN COLLEGE FOR WOMEN (BA 1909), CORNELL UNIVERSITY (MA 1912, PhD 1914).

Anna Helen Tappan was born in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, the ninth of eleven children of Anna (Grand-Girard), born in 1850, and David Stanton Tappan (1845–1922), natives of Ohio who married in 1869. Her father earned a bachelor's degree in 1864 and a master's degree in 1866 from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and graduated from the Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1867. He was ordained as a Presbyterian minister and held various academic and pastoral positions before and after serving as president of Miami University 1899–1902. Tappan Hall there is named for him. Helen Tappan's siblings were Benjamin (1871–72), Oella Stanton (1873–1952), Julia May (1875–1972), Paul Whiting (1877–ca. 1954), David Stanton Jr. (1880–1968), Frank Girard (b. 1882), Lucy Frederica (1884–1900), George Herdman (1886–1950), Edwin Stanton (1890–1892), and Margaret (1894–1972). Of the seven siblings who survived to adulthood, one brother became a physician, another became a missionary in China, and her youngest sister earned a doctorate in education.

In 1905 Helen Tappan graduated from Everts High School in Circleville, Ohio, where her father was pastor of the Presbyterian Church. She then attended Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio; she graduated with honors in 1909 and was an instructor there for the next two years. In 1911 Tappan enrolled at Cornell University where she was to remain for the next three years. She received her master's degree in 1912 with a major in pure mathematics and a minor in mathematical physics. She was a scholar 1912–13 and an Erastus Brooks fellow 1913–14 before receiving her PhD in 1914 with work in algebraic geometry as a student of Virgil Snyder. For her doctorate Tappan presented minors of mathematical analysis and philosophy.

After receiving her doctorate, Tappan joined the faculty at Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (now Iowa State University of Science and Technology) in Ames. She remained for eleven years: as instructor 1914–18, assistant professor 1918–22, and associate professor 1922–25. Others on the mathematics faculty at Iowa State in that period included [Julia T. Colpitts](#) and [Fay Farnum](#).

In 1925 Tappan returned to Western College for Women as professor of mathematics and head of the department. She also served as dean of women from 1927 until 1941 and as academic dean from 1941 until 1944, when she resigned that position to return to full-time teaching. She was head of the department at the time of her retirement in 1954 as academic dean emeritus. In 1957–58 she served as acting head of the mathematics department. When she retired, it was noted that she had spent part of her summers in southern California with relatives and that she planned to make her home with her sister and niece in Pasadena.

Western College honored her in 1953 as one of the ten outstanding living alumnae and again in 1954 with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree. In 1974 the college merged with Miami University, which created an interdisciplinary program, the Western College Program, to continue Western's then current approach to education. In 1990 the Western program established a peer learning center called the Anna Helen Tappan Center for Computer Assisted Learning, whose tutors are called Tappan Tutors. Tappan House, the third and fourth floors of Barton Hall at Iowa State University, is also named in her honor.

In about 1940 Tappan described herself as a Presbyterian and a Republican with interests in reading and dramatics; "her singular ability in dramatics contributed to the success of one of the first faculty plays" at Western College (Nelson, *The Western College for Women*, 138). Her travels in Great Britain, Europe, and the United States included a

trip to Europe with friends in the summer of 1928. After her retirement Tappan moved to South Pasadena, California.

Helen Tappan died in 1971 at age eighty-three at the Westover Retirement Home in Hamilton, Ohio, after a long illness. A memorial service was held at nearby Western College where the Helen Tappan Memorial Fund was established.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, AAAS, Sigma Delta Epsilon, Nat. Assoc. of Deans of Women, NEA, AAUW, AAUP, Sigma Xi, Pi Mu Epsilon.

Thesis and dissertation:

1912 The relations between the theorems of Pappus and Desargues in the foundations of geometry. MA thesis, Cornell University, directed by Virgil Snyder. Typescript.

1914 Plane sextic curves invariant under birational transformations. PhD dissertation, Cornell University, directed by Virgil Snyder. Typescript. Printed version, 1915, reprinted from *Amer. J. Math.* 37:309–36.

Publication:

1915 Plane sextic curves invariant under birational transformations. *Amer. J. Math.* 37:309–36. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 45.0826.01 (W. Fr. Meyer); *Rev. semestr. publ. math.* 25, pt. 1: 2 ([E. B. Cowley](#)). Presented by title as “Plane sextic curves invariant under a group of linear transformations” to the AMS, New York City, 30 Dec 1913; abstract: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 20:289 #6.

References to: AmMSc 3–8, 9P; AmWom 1935–40; WhAm 8; WhoAmEd 1; WhoAmW 1.

“Tappan, Davies Retire from Faculty in May.” *Western Round-Up*, 14 May 1954.

Related manuscript material:

President: 1899–1902. David S. Tappan. Papers. Miami University Archives.

Other sources: Owens questionnaire 1937; Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; Western College Memorial Archives (at the Miami University Libraries); Miami University Archives; communications with Iowa State University Archives and with Western College Alumnae Association; Narka Nelson, *The Western College for Women* (Oxford, OH: Western College, 1967); NatCAB 21 (Tappan, David Stanton); WhAm 1 (Tappan, David Stanton); US census 1870 IA, 1900, 1910 OH, 1920 IA, 1920 CA, 1930 OH.

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