

**MORENUS, Eugenie M.** February 21, 1881–October 15, 1966.

VASSAR COLLEGE (BA 1904, MA 1905), COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY (PhD 1922).

Eugenie Maria Morenus was born in Cleveland, New York, the first of two children of Maria Euphemia (Van Blarcom) (1855–1924) and Eugene Morenus (1854–1929), both natives of New York. In the 1900 census her father was described as manager of a glass works in Cleveland, New York, and later as a manufacturer of thermometers. Her brother, Jeremiah B. (1884–1969), was also born in New York State.

In 1900, when she was nineteen, Morenus was a boarder in East Washington, Pennsylvania, while attending school. After receiving her bachelor's degree from Vassar College in 1904, she remained there on a Coykendall scholarship for the year 1904–05, wrote a thesis in algebraic geometry, and received a master's degree in 1905. From January 1906 until June 1907 Morenus was a teacher of mathematics and Latin at Watertown (New York) High School. She was a substitute in mathematics at Vassar 1907–08 and was a teacher of mathematics at Poughkeepsie High School 1908–09.

In 1909, at the age of twenty-eight, Morenus began her long association with Sweet Briar College, about a dozen miles from Lynchburg, Virginia. This college for women had just begun to offer instruction at the postsecondary level three years before she arrived. She was instructor in mathematics and Latin 1909–16, associate professor of mathematics 1916–18, and then professor of mathematics. She was on leave 1918–19 and returned as head of the department, a position in which she continued until her retirement in 1946. Among those hired by Sweet Briar while Morenus was head of the department were [Helen Calkins](#) 1927–28, who was acting head while Morenus was on leave; [Julia Wells Bower](#) 1927–30; [Ethel Moody](#) 1930–33; and [Nancy Cole](#) 1933–43, who served as acting head 1934–35 and 1941–42.

After Morenus went to Sweet Briar she continued her studies at the University of Chicago in the summer of 1912 and at Göttingen in the summer of 1913. She studied at Columbia University in the summers of 1915 and 1916 and held an alumnae fellowship from Vassar for study at Columbia 1918–19. She studied at Columbia again during the summers of 1920 and 1921 and received her PhD from Columbia in 1922. Although she wanted to find a position at an institution that supported research, Morenus returned to Sweet Briar and attempted to continue her work in differential geometry. In May 1923 she passed, cum laude, the first part of the associate examination of the American Society of Actuaries.

Morenus often attended meetings of the AMS, and she attended the International Mathematical Congress in Toronto in 1924 and in Oslo in 1936. She spent the year 1927–28 as an AAUW Anna C. Brackett memorial fellow in Cambridge, England. In the summer of 1930 she did additional work at the University of Chicago. Morenus had leaves in 1934–35, when she took an extensive trip that included India, and in 1941–42, when she spent part of the year in Berkeley, California. She later reported having studied at the University of California.

At Sweet Briar she was known for the excellence of her scholarship and her high standards. She was active within the college, where for many years she was secretary of the faculty and was chairman of the committee on instruction. The Sweet Briar memorial tribute by two colleagues, Gladys Boone and Bertha Wailes, at the college also conveys a sense of her non-scholarly interests.

One of her earliest outside activities at Sweet Briar was to enroll in a cookery class offered in the domestic science department which then existed. She sang in the choir, was considered an excellent photographer and furnished numerous pictures for the early yearbooks. She was also interested in athletics, and at times is said to have helped President Benedict keep an eye on swimmers in the lake. However, riding was her chief joy, and she and her horse, October, affectionately known as Toby, were familiar sights in the countryside as well as on college campus. She rode almost daily, and on occasion took students on overnight horseback trips to Peaks of Otter, Natural Bridge, into the mountains to Hog Camp, and to other distant places otherwise out-of-bounds to student riders.

Dramatics was another of Gene's loves. She planned and directed faculty plays which were an annual event in those days, starring in a number of them herself, . . . . During her sojourn in Lynchburg its Little Theatre also benefited from her talents. (Sweet Briar College Archives)

Morenus engaged in a number of professional activities. She was a charter member of the MAA, was a member of the Virginia Academy of Science, and was active in the AAUW. For the latter she served as president of the Sweet Briar branch and as chairman of the education committee of the Virginia division at various times.

During World War I, in response to calls for volunteers to help staff factories, she worked for six weeks one summer at an overall factory in Lynchburg. Her family owned a candle factory in her hometown, which required some attention on her part. It was later sold, and Morenus made bequests to Vassar and to Sweet Briar. In about 1940 Morenus described herself as an Episcopalian and a Republican. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She made other trips abroad in addition to her trips to study in Göttingen and Cambridge and her trip during her leave of 1934–35. These included a trip to Europe in summer 1936, a cruise in February 1950, and a European trip in 1955.

After her retirement from Sweet Briar in 1946, Morenus changed her address in AMS membership lists from Sweet Briar to her family home in Cleveland, New York, northeast of Syracuse. She taught at Connecticut College in 1947, and for some time after that she spent her summers in Cleveland and her winters in Lynchburg. Sometime later she moved to Babson Park, Florida. She was in a hospital in Lake Wales, Florida, most of the last three years of her life.

Eugenie Morenus died in 1966 in Lake Wales at age eighty-five. She was cremated, and her ashes were sent back to her home town of Cleveland, New York, where her brother was living. In 1960 the Eugenie M. Morenus Scholarship endowment was established by one of the first five graduates of Sweet Briar in the class of 1910. Proceeds are to benefit a student majoring in mathematics or one of the sciences. Six months before her death, the Southeastern Section of the MAA recognized her as one its remaining eight charter members.

**Organizational affiliations:** AMS, MAA (charter member), AAAS (fellow), AAUW, AAUP.

**Thesis and dissertation:**

**1905** Some curves connected with a system of similar conics. MA thesis, Vassar College. Typescript.

**1922** Geometric properties completely characterizing the set of all the curves of constant pressure in a field of force. PhD dissertation, Columbia University, directed by Edward Kasner. Printed version, 1922, Press of the John C. Winston Co., Philadelphia, PA.

**Abstract:**

**1922** Geometric properties of the system of all the curves of constant pressure in a plane field of force. *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 28:242 #17. Based on PhD dissertation. Presented by title to the AMS, New York City, 25 Feb 1922.

**References to:** AmMSc 4–8, 9P–10P; AmWom 1935–40.

“Dr. Eugenie Morenus Dies at Florida Home.” *Lynchburg Daily Advance*, 19 Oct 1966.

**Other sources:** PhD dissertation vita 1922; Owens questionnaires 1937, 1940; Maltby, *History of the Fellowships*; Columbia University Archives; Society of Actuaries Library; Vassar College Archives; communication with Sweet Briar College Archives and with Alumnae and Alumni of Vassar College (AAVC); US Census 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920 NY, 1900 PA, 1910 VA.

Last modified: March 8, 2009.