

McKEE, Ruth (Stauffer). July 16, 1910–January 9, 1993.

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE (BA 1931), BRYN MAWR COLLEGE (MA 1933, PhD 1935).

Ruth Caroline Stauffer was the second of three children of Hannah (Henry) (1876–1961) and Charles Christian Stauffer (1880–1968), a physician. Both parents were born in Boyertown, Pennsylvania. Her father received degrees from Franklin and Marshall College and the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania. Her mother earned a certificate from the Keystone Normal School (later Kutztown State Teachers College, now Kutztown University of Pennsylvania) and was an elementary school teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Boyertown before her marriage in 1905; after her marriage she worked as the first assistant in her husband's office. All three children were born in Harrisburg and received their undergraduate degrees from Swarthmore. Ruth Stauffer's sister, Martha J. (1909–1991), received an MA from Columbia, studied at Harvard, and was a mathematics teacher in a high school and in a community college in Harrisburg. Ruth Stauffer's brother, Charles Henry (1913–1997), received a master's degree and a PhD in physical chemistry from Harvard, and was a chemistry professor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, St. Lawrence University, and Bates College.

Ruth Stauffer received her elementary and secondary education in the public schools of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; she graduated from the all-girls Central High School at age fifteen in 1926 and did an additional year at the new coeducational William Penn High School before enrolling at Swarthmore College. She originally intended to take pre-med courses at Swarthmore. As she said in 1981, "I wanted to be an MD for a long time, and when I went to college I took pre-med courses, but I didn't do too well. . . . In the meantime, math was easy! So I took more math classes because they were easy. . . . I think that this is maybe important . . . I went to a girls' high school; we had excellent math teachers. They were women who went to places like Wellesley, and they were inspirations" (Smithsonian tapes). She earned her undergraduate degree at Swarthmore in 1931 with a major in mathematics and with honors in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. Arnold Dresden was her teacher and advisor there, and she considered him a friend throughout his life.

It was Dresden who urged Stauffer to go to Bryn Mawr College and who helped her obtain the mathematics graduate scholarship there for her first year, 1931–32. She received her master's degree in 1933 and continued her work at Bryn Mawr the following year as a scholar of the Society of Pennsylvania Women in New York. At Bryn Mawr she studied with [Anna Pell Wheeler](#), Emmy Noether, Gustav A. Hedlund, and [Marguerite Lehr](#). Of Pell Wheeler she later wrote, "She continued to be interested in me, my family, and my work her entire life, coming to Harrisburg by train as late as the 1960's to visit us" (Smithsonian questionnaire 1981). Stauffer, who was Noether's only doctoral student in the United States, was one of four women who studied with Noether at Bryn Mawr in 1934–35. The other three, with postdoctoral scholarships or fellowships, were [Marie Weiss](#), PhD Stanford University 1928; Olga Taussky (Taussky-Todd), PhD Vienna 1930; and [Grace Shover \(Quinn\)](#), PhD Ohio State University 1931. Accounts of their experiences that year appear in **1983**. Emmy Noether, whom Stauffer later described as "teacher, PhD Director, and encouraging friend" (Smithsonian questionnaire), died suddenly in April 1935, a great blow to Stauffer. Her doctoral examination was given by Richard Brauer, then at the Institute for Advanced Study. After receiving her degree in June 1935

Stauffer spent the following year, 1935–36, teaching mathematics at the Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore and doing postdoctoral work in algebra with Oscar Zariski at the Johns Hopkins University. She taught mathematics at Miss Fine's School in Princeton, New Jersey, 1936–37.

During her last year at Bryn Mawr College, Ruth Stauffer met George W. McKee, then a law student in Philadelphia, and also from Harrisburg. Even though they were almost neighbors in Harrisburg they had not known one another there. They married in 1937. George McKee was born in 1908 and graduated from Princeton in 1931 and from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1934. He had his own law practice in Harrisburg from 1936 until 1990, although he was semi-retired from about 1980. He served as a lieutenant in the US Navy during World War II.

During 1938–39, while living in Harrisburg, Ruth McKee taught algebra as an instructor at Bryn Mawr; however, after becoming pregnant, she was too ill to continue commuting to Bryn Mawr. Their first daughter, Clara, was born in October 1939 and their second, Martha, in December 1941. Clara McKee Rader received a bachelor's degree from Bryn Mawr and a master's degree in English from Yale and taught English; she is a pastor's wife and has been active in family and marriage counseling and in religious education. Martha McKee Keyser received her bachelor's degree from Swarthmore and did graduate work in psychology at Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania. She taught English and now works as a family therapist.

Ruth McKee wrote in 1981 that “work in mathematics came to a halt when the girls were born” (Smithsonian questionnaire). In 1953, about a dozen years after her youngest daughter was born, McKee began her employment with the Joint State Government Commission in Harrisburg. As an analyst she did mathematical statistics for this non-partisan research agency for the Pennsylvania state legislature until her retirement in 1980. She planned and directed analyses and reports of the commission in areas such as efficiency of Pennsylvania state mental hospitals, traffic safety laws, costs of state owned and related colleges and universities, equalization of public school subsidies, and retirement costs as related to proposed liberalization of benefits. In her 1981 questionnaire McKee credited Noether's “methods of working and thinking” as greatly influencing her “approach to problem solving at the Joint State Government Commission.”

Ruth McKee's non-mathematical interests included story telling (she was a member of the National League of Story Tellers), sketching and oil painting, weaving, bird watching, the Girl Scouts (she was a leader), and teaching in Sunday School of the United Church of Christ. She was involved with parent education groups through various local civic clubs in Harrisburg. In the mid-1960s the McKees winterized, and moved to, Ruth McKee's parents' former summer home in Dauphin, just northwest of Harrisburg.

In 1980 George and Ruth McKee moved to Pennswood Village, a retirement community in Newtown, Pennsylvania. While there they were both active in volunteer work, he as a president of the Pennswood Village's resident association and she as a contributor to budgeting and planning for the association. They had many friends there and made trips to Princeton for art shows and lectures. Ruth McKee also resumed her interest in art and was able for the first time to work in three dimensions and develop her abilities in sculpture. Also, in her retirement she became active in the Society of Friends. Ruth McKee's older daughter said in a phone

conversation with one of the authors that she had an amazing combination of gifts and “made a huge impression on all of us. She had friends of all ages.” Ruth McKee died at Pennswood Village at age eighty-two in 1993. George McKee died there just over two years later.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, AAUW.

Dissertation:

1935 [Stauffer, R.] The construction of a normal basis in a separable normal extension field. PhD dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, directed by Emmy Noether. Printed version, 1936, reprinted from *Amer. J. Math.* 58:585–97.

Publications:

1936 [Stauffer, R.] The construction of a normal basis in a separable normal extension field. *Amer. J. Math.* 58:585–97. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 62.0109.01 (E. Trost); *Zbl* 014.19801 (M. Deuring).

1982 with B. A. Case, N. J. Owens, D. V. Widder, and [V. A. Widder](#). Anna Johnson Pell Wheeler (1883–1966): Colloquium Lecturer, 1927. *AWM Newsletter* 12 (4): 4–13. Remarks made at Symposium sponsored by the AWM, Ann Arbor, MI, 20 Aug 1980. Adaptation: 1996. “Reminiscences about Anna Johnson Pell Wheeler.” In *A Century of Mathematical Meetings* ed. B. A. Case, 311–19. Providence, RI: American Mathematical Society.

1983 with G. S. Quinn, M. Lehr, and O. Taussky. Emmy Noether in Bryn Mawr. In *Emmy Noether in Bryn Mawr*, eds. B. Srinivasan and J. Sally, 139–46. New York: Springer-Verlag. Presented as part of “Emmy Noether at Erlangen, Göttingen, and Bryn Mawr,” panel discussion at AWM Symposium in Honor of Emmy Noether’s 100th Birthday, Bryn Mawr, PA, 18 Mar 1982. Review: *Zbl* 557.01012 (I. Schneider).

References to: AmMSc 10P–11P; AmMWSc 12P–13P, 14–16.

Kenschaft, Pat. “A Career of Mathematics in Government: Ruth Stauffer McKee.” *AWM Newsletter* 41, no. 3 (2011): 19–22. Written in 1992.

Other sources: PhD dissertation vita 1935; Smithsonian questionnaire 1981; Smithsonian meeting tapes 1981; telephone conversation with Clara McKee Rader, 1 Dec 2000; Bryn Mawr College alumnae records.

Last modified: May 17, 2011.