

**REKLIS, Virginia (Modesitt).** June 15, 1910–November 29, 2000.

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE (BA 1931), UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS (MA 1932, PhD 1937).

Virginia Modesitt was born in Bloomington, Indiana, the only child of Floy (Underwood) (1885–1984) and Raymond Lyons Modesitt (1883–1927). Both of her parents were natives of central Indiana; her mother was born in Putnam County and her father in neighboring Parke County. Both received bachelor's degrees from Indiana University in 1908; her father also earned a master's degree from Indiana the following year. They were married on August 17, 1909, and Virginia Modesitt was born the following June. The 1910 census lists her father as a high school teacher in Bloomington.

Raymond Modesitt became a teacher of mathematics at Eastern Illinois State Normal School, in Charleston (later Eastern Illinois State Teachers College, now Eastern Illinois University). He did additional graduate work in mathematics at Columbia University in 1911 and at the University of Illinois in 1921. In 1913 R. L. Modesitt served as chairman of a committee of the mathematics section of the University of Illinois High-School Conference that studied the establishment of standards for high-school algebra; he later wrote an article for the *Mathematics Teacher* on fundamental principles of algebra (15 (1922): 332–46). Virginia Modesitt graduated from Eastern Illinois State Teachers College High School in 1927. Her father died suddenly in December of that year, and she remained in Charleston and attended the teachers college for a year before entering Mount Holyoke College in September 1928. She had a major in mathematics and a minor in astronomy at Mount Holyoke. She did honors work with [Marie Litzinger](#), who had not yet earned her doctorate, and all of her mathematics course work there was with Litzinger and [Emilie Norton Martin](#). Modesitt attended Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the summer of 1930 and graduated from Mount Holyoke magna cum laude in 1931. She also tutored during her senior year at Mount Holyoke.

In the fall of 1931 Modesitt entered the University of Illinois for graduate work. She received her master's degree the following year and stayed at Illinois until she received her doctorate in 1937 with a minor in astronomy. Her dissertation in differential geometry was directed by Harry Levy. In addition to her course work with Levy, she later recalled and mentioned courses with R. D. Carmichael, A. B. Coble, and A. R. Crathorne. She read history of mathematics with G. A. Miller and took higher algebra with [Olive C. Hazlett](#). While at Illinois she was a secretary in the astronomy department 1933–34 and was an assistant in the mathematics department 1934–37. In 1934 she published an article with a fellow graduate student, Ted Martin (later chair of the mathematics department at MIT), in the *Astrophysical Journal*.

After receiving her degree in 1937, Modesitt took a temporary instructorship at Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Virginia to substitute for someone on leave of absence. Modesitt took more mathematics courses at the University of Michigan during the summer of 1938. The position at Randolph-Macon was extended one more year, but no position was available there in the fall of 1939 even though she had enthusiastic support from [Gillie Larew](#), the mathematics department chair at Randolph-Macon.

In 1939 Modesitt moved to Chicago, where she was an instructor at Wright Junior College for the next four years. She had learned of the job there through [Ruth Mason Ballard](#), with whom Modesitt had shared an office during 1936–37, Modesitt's last year at Illinois. Ruth Mason had been an instructor at Illinois before moving to Wright Junior College in 1938. At Wright they worked together on the development of survey courses for junior colleges, and both remained there until 1943, when Wright was taken over by the Navy as barracks and all the junior colleges in the city were combined into one. While in Chicago Modesitt was a member of the Women's Math Club and presented a paper at one of the meetings.

On January 20, 1942, Virginia Modesitt married Ernest Peter Reklis, whom she had met while both were students at the University of Illinois. Ernest Reklis, born in Cicero, Illinois, in 1912, was an engineer who worked at Commonwealth Edison in Chicago after receiving his BS in engineering from Illinois in 1939. He was in the army from 1943 to 1945; they moved to the East, where both worked at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. Virginia Reklis was first a "computer" and then a mathematician at the Ballistic Research Laboratories, Army Service Forces, 1944–47. After the war Ernest Reklis remained at the Ballistic Research Laboratories at the Aberdeen Proving Ground as an engineer working on supersonic wind tunnels.

Their son, Robert Peter Reklis, was born in September 1947. He subsequently earned a PhD in physics and is a research scientist in California. Virginia Reklis did not seek employment while their son was young. However, she later was an instructor of extension courses: for the University of Maryland at the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland 1960–65, and for the University of Delaware at the Aberdeen Proving Ground 1962–66.

In her 1985 Smithsonian questionnaire, Virginia Reklis noted that she was brought up in an academic community and that her father was an outstanding teacher of mathematics. She described her religious preference as Presbyterian. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the P.E.O. Sisterhood, a philanthropic educational organization. Beginning in 1967, Reklis published several genealogies, some of which were coauthored with Helen Kurtz Wray. Virginia Reklis's husband died at age sixty-two in 1975; her mother died at ninety-nine in 1984. In the middle 1980s Virginia Reklis lived in her mother's former home in Danville, Indiana. She later moved to California, closer to her son's family.

Virginia Reklis died at Palo Alto Commons, an assisted living facility in Palo Alto, California, in November 2000 at age ninety. She was survived by her son, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. A memorial service was held in Danville, Indiana, and she was buried in the Danville South Cemetery.

**Organizational affiliations:** AMS, MAA, Sigma Delta Epsilon, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, Pi Mu Epsilon.

**Dissertation:**

**1937** [Modesitt, V.] Some singular properties of conformal transformations between Riemannian spaces. PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, directed by Harry Levy. Typescript. Abstract, 1937, Urbana, IL.

**Publications:**

**1934** [Modesitt, V.] with T. Martin. A solution of the light-curve of X trianguli. *Astrophys. J.* 79: 361–36.

**1938** [Modesitt, V.] Some singular properties of conformal transformations between Riemannian spaces. *Amer. J. Math.* 60:325–36. Reviews: *JFM* 64.1362.01 (K. H. Weise); *Zbl* 018.42303 (D. J. Struik).

**1942a** [Modesitt, V.] Review of *A Mathematician's Apology*, by G. H. Hardy. *Natl. Math. Mag.* 16:311.

**1942b** The use of medians in a testing program in mathematics. *Natl. Math. Mag.* 16:345–49.

**Technical reports:**

**1946** Comparison of optical and radar observations of WAC Corporal (Rd 10). Memorandum Report no. 438. Ordnance Dept. Ballistic Research Laboratories, Aberdeen Proving Ground.

**1948** with C. R. Cassity. The calculation of maximum ordinate of an A–4 rocket from conditions at burnout. Report no. 655. Ballistic Research Laboratories, Aberdeen Proving Ground.

**Abstract not listed above:**

**1941** [Modesitt, V.] The teaching of mathematics in the junior college. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 48:167 #1. Presented to the MAA and the NCTM, Baton Rouge, LA, 1 Jan 1941.

**Genealogies:**

The family of Charles and Frances Modesitt. 1967.

The family of William and Jane Powers (Neves) Harris of Putnam County, Indiana. 1972. Some Underwood families of Hendricks and Putnam Counties, Indiana. 1977 and 1993. with H. K. Kurtz. The family of Conrad and Elizabeth Kurtz of Nelson County, Kentucky. 1992.

with H. K. Kurtz. The family of David Cassity of Bath County, Kentucky and Putnam County, Indiana. 1992

with H. K. Kurtz. A Wingate family of Putnam County, Indiana from Delaware and Maryland by the way of Kentucky. 1993.

**References to:**

“Reklis.” (Obituary) *Hendricks County (IN) Flyer*, 11 Dec 2000.

“Virginia Reklis.” (Obituary) *Danville (IN) Republican*, 14 Dec 2000.

**Other sources:** PhD dissertation vita 1937; Owens questionnaire 1940; Smithsonian questionnaire 1985; conversation with author and Uta C. Merzbach, June 24 1986, Danville, IN; Mount Holyoke College Archives; communication with Danville, IN, Public Library; Stanford, “The History of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Illinois”; US Census 1910 IN, 1920, 1930 IL.

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