


1998

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Kristen Terranova
La Salle University

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Recommended Citation

Terranova, Kristen, "Ella Eustis Wister Haines (1879-1969)" (1998). *People and Places*. 13.
http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/people_places/13

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Belfield & Wakefield: [A Link to La Salle's Past](#)

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Ella Eustis Wister Haines

By: Kristen Terranova

Ella Eustis Wister was born on August 30, 1879 to William Rotch Wister and Mary Rebecca Eustis, at Mrs. Wister’s mother’s home in Milton, Massachusetts. At that time, she had two older sisters, Mary Channing (called Mamie, Molly) and Frances Anne. When Ella was less than a day old, she was lying in a big chair, and was sat upon by Frances. She later said about this incident, "Early...do older sisters establish their authority" (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 1). Miss Wister would later acquire a brother John Caspar (called Jack), who was her main playmate throughout her childhood. The Wisters lived just off of the Belfield estate, which is now part of the La Salle University campus. William Rotch Wister grew up at Belfield and stayed near it, because his mother lived at Belfield until her death.

Miss Wister and her family also had many other relatives in the area, in addition to her grandmother at Belfield, with whom she spent much time. The house in which she lived, "Wister," (which stood across Clarkson Avenue from what is now La Salle’s Fine Art’s Studio) had a stage erected in the front parlor for the children to put on many of their plays and operas. (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 69) The children were the entertainment for all of the visitors who stopped by their home. Miss Wister and her cousins did not just put on these plays when they were children; these antics continued on into adulthood, even when some of them were married (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 70).



In October 1898, Miss Wister "came out" as a debutante (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 96). Her time began to be full of parties, beaux, and wooing, until she met Deidrich Jansen (Wistar) Haines (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 100). He proposed to Miss Wister and they became engaged on March 27, 1904. They were married in the library of "Wister" on October 20, 1904 (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 132). Mr. Haines was thirty-three, and Miss Wister was twenty-two. They moved to Des Moines, Iowa, where Mr. Haines held

a position as manager of a United Gas Company plant (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 133).

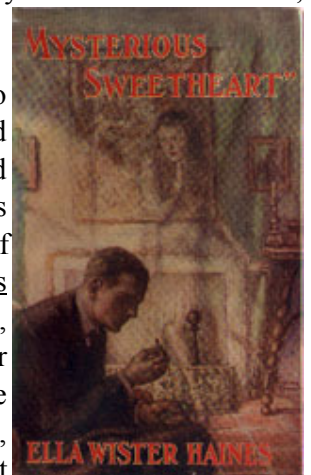
During Mr. and Mrs. Haines’ time in Iowa, they had four children. Caspar Wister (Cap) in 1905, William Wister (Bill) in 1908, D. Jansen Jr. (Dutch) in 1911, and John Wister (Johnny) in 1912. Mrs. Haines was obviously very proud of all of her sons, because she mentioned them throughout her memoir, [Reminiscences of a Victorian Child](#). Cap was in the insurance business (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 149); Bill became a well known author, playwright and screen writer (his most famous work being [Command Decision](#)) (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 172); Dutch went through medical school and became a doctor (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 172); and even though all four sons served in World War II, Johnny was the only one not to return to his mother. He was captured by the Japanese at the fall of Corregidor and died in 1943 (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 151). When Bill was born, Mr. and Mrs. Haines were quite afraid that he would not live very long, as he was quite a frail baby, but, Bill outlived all of his brothers, dying at the ripe old age of 81 (Haines, [Reminiscences](#) 145).

Raising children was not Mrs. Haines' only occupation. In 1914, Mrs. Haines began her writing career. This decision was followed by six years of submitting work and having it rejected. Then finally, in 1920, three of her human interest pieces were bought by "Successful Farming." (Haines, Reminiscences 157) After this beginning, she went on to write numerous articles, stories and serials (a series of chapters of a story in a newspaper spread over 21 days) for newspapers and magazines, in addition to three mystery-romance novels. Mrs. Haines enjoyed a large correspondence from her readers, which kept her very busy along with her sons and husband. (Wister Folder 142)

Mr. Haines hated the fact that his wife was an author (Haines, Reminiscences 158). This may have not been the only problem that Mr. and Mrs. Haines had during their marriage. In her memoir, Mrs. Haines rarely mentions her husband when she was writing about the time when they lived in Iowa. This time spanned about 25 years of their life together. The time when Mr. Haines gets more than a passing mention in her memoir, is when he loses his job in 1928, and undergoes something of a nervous breakdown. Mrs. Haines comments that this illness could have been due to "worry of business or domestic issues" (Haines, Reminiscences 148). The word domestic is quite ambiguous in that phrase. Does she mean domestic issues as in the country's economic status? Or possibly problems between Mr. Haines and herself? If this phrase had been spoken instead of written about 23 years later, it may have been more possible to determine what Mrs. Haines was trying to convey with that phrase.

The meaning of the ambiguous phrase has a little light shed upon it as the reader continues with Mrs. Haines' memoir and finds out that Mr. Haines was sent to Europe for a year (mid-1928 to mid-1929 (Haines Reminiscences 149)), with one of his sons accompanying him, by his brother Robert. It isn't this fact that sheds the light; it is the comment that Mrs. Haines makes about this trip; "It was a tremendous break for us all." (Haines, Reminiscences 149) Was the family just worn out from taking care of Mr. Haines? Did he make it more difficult than it had to be? Were there extenuating circumstances? During 1928, while Mr. Haines was in Europe, the family moved to Philadelphia. Mrs. Haines, Bill and Johnny moved into "Wister" with Mrs. Haines' mother, Mrs. Mary Wister; Cap and Mr. Haines lived at "Wyck," in Germantown, the home of his ancestors, the Wisters. The two houses were very close, and they visited each other often, but they did not live together. (Haines, Reminiscences 150)

When Mrs. Haines and family moved to Philadelphia, they had no means of supporting themselves, as Mr. Haines was out of work and couldn't work while in Europe either. By default, Mrs. Haines had been moved into the position as head breadwinner for the family. As previously stated, she had been writing and making a small amount of money for sometime now. Two of her three novels, Mysterious Sweetheart and Lady Slipper, were published in 1929, and the third, Mad Honeymoon in 1930. The income was apparently not enough for the family to survive on; Mrs. Haines began to contemplate what else she could do. While talking to one of her friends about this subject, Mrs. Haines was told to "Stop writing and use your personality. That is your real gift" (Haines, Reminiscences 155). She took this advice to heart and took a position with the Philadelphia Electric Company in the Public Relations Department (Haines, Reminiscences 149).



Mrs. Haines worked in this position for 20 years. She was in charge of films and lecturing on the history, achievement and advantages of electrical service. Officially, she was the Director of the Educational Film Service of the Philadelphia Electric Company. (Haines, Reminiscences 157) She didn't sell anything but the Philadelphia Electric Company itself (Haines, Reminiscences

164). Not all of the films were about electricity; the subjects varied from historical films to musicals to the popular films of the time (Haines, Reminiscences 165). It is quite possible that Mrs. Haines was "the first woman in Philadelphia industry to launch this new form of Public Relations" (Haines, Reminiscences 166-D).

Mrs. Haines and her workmates were a travelling movie theater of sorts. They went to the different meeting places of groups and churches all around the area to show their films. This activity got Mrs. Haines involved in many of the clubs that she visited to lecture at and show films. Some of the organizations that Mrs. Haines became a member of included The Red Cross, The Historical Society of Germantown, The Grumblethorpe Association, the America Women's Voluntary Service, and The Republican Women of Pennsylvania. At the time that she wrote her memoir, 1953, she listed all of the clubs to which she belonged, and they totaled 41 (Haines, Reminiscences 166B, 166C).

While Mrs. Haines was lucky enough to find a job that she enjoyed, however tiresome, Mr. Haines was not as lucky. In 1931, he found a job, but he was unable to hold it long enough for him and his wife to live together again on their own. It wasn't his fault that the job didn't last; it was the business that fell through. In 1934, the three oldest sons got married. Mr. and Mrs. Haines were unable to make it to Cap's wedding, but they attended Bill's and Dutch's wedding together. This led to their being able to live together again, at 11th and Pine in Philadelphia, until Mr. Haines' death on March 17, 1943. (Haines, Reminiscences 150)

There is one entire chapter in her memoir devoted to Mrs. Haines' description of how happy she and her husband were. She talks of all of the travelling they enjoyed, especially in Mr. Haines' Ford (Haines, Reminiscences 167). This chapter in her memoir seems like an afterthought in which Mrs. Haines tries to convince everyone that they really were happy, despite the time that they did not live together and Mr. Haines' illness. In 1935 he underwent a couple of surgeries and apparently was never really the same after that (Haines, Reminiscences 150). Perhaps they really were happy, but to make such a point of putting in that chapter almost implies that Mrs. Haines had been having second thoughts about how her marriage was portrayed throughout her memoir. As any married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Haines probably had their ups and downs, though that does not mean that the two of them were happy or unhappy the majority of the time.

Mrs. Haines ends her memoir with a special message to all of her female descendents. She talks about how it was her generation that got women into the workplace and suffrage. It is now the coming generation's job to get equal rights and equal pay, equal to the men, that is (Haines, Reminiscences 166-166A). Until her death on February 14, 1969, Mrs. Haines was always doing some kind of work to better things (Wister Folder 143).

In her lifetime, Ella Eustis Wister Haines did accomplished much. She raised four sons, had a writing career and became a pioneer for women in the field of public relations. Undoubtedly, she is a fascinating woman and one to look up to.

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