



From Winthrop to Washington

Cryptology at Winthrop College

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Dr. Ruth W. Stokes

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Dr. Ruth Wyckliffe Stokes '11

Head of the Mathematics department and professor of Cryptology

Ruth Wyckliffe Stokes was born in Mountville, South Carolina, on October 12, 1891. She was the daughter of Dr. William Henry Stokes and Frances Emily Fuller Stokes. She had two sisters, Marie V. Stokes, and Mrs. Sara Stokes Hunter.

Ruth Stokes attended Winthrop Normal and Industrial College in Rock Hill, South Carolina, from September 1907, until June 1911, when she received her B.A. While at Winthrop she was a member of the Y.W.C.A., the Rural School Improvement Association, the Cecilia Chorus, the Winthrop Society, a charter member of the Wade Hampton Literary Society as well as Censor, Secretary and President of the Wade Hampton Literary Society. She was also one of the six state fair dressmakers and an Art Editor for The Tatler yearbook.

After graduating from Winthrop Ruth Stokes spent the next decade teaching math at various schools in South Carolina; this included high schools in Denmark, Spartanburg, and Greenville. From 1913 to 1916 she was the principal of Ebenezer Graded School in Rock Hill, South Carolina. From 1916 to 1917 she was the head of the math department at Synodical College in Fulton, Missouri. From 1922 to 1923 she attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and received her Masters degree in 1923.

After receiving her Masters, Ruth Stokes returned to Winthrop College as an assistant mathematics teacher. She would remain in this position for the next five years and during the summers she would take classes at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. In 1928, Duke University accepted her into their PhD. Program, At Duke she would work as a graduate assistant and be awarded her degree in 1931. This was the first PhD in Mathematics awarded by Duke University. Her dissertation was published in the Spring of 1931 under the title of "A Geometric Theory of Solution of Linear Inequalities." Dr. Stokes remained at Duke as an instructor until 1932.

From 1932 until 1935, Dr. Stokes taught various higher level math courses at North Texas State Teachers College in Denton, Texas. From 1935 until 1936 Dr. Stokes was the head of the math department at Mitchell College in Statesville, North Carolina. In 1936 Dr. Stokes returned to Winthrop College as a professor of astronomy and math and eventually became head of the mathematics department. For the next decade Dr. Stokes would teach various math classes at Winthrop College. In 1942, she became the driving force behind the starting and teaching of the cryptology classes. Also in 1942, Dr. Stokes was one of the first in the nation to respond to the national call by the American Astronomical Association for training in astronomy and navigation for Army Air Corps pilots.

In 1946, after many disputes over funding for the math department and other disputes with the administration at Winthrop, Dr. Stokes left Winthrop and joined the faculty at Syracuse University. At Syracuse she held dual roles in mathematics and education and was promoted to associate professor in 1953. From 1956 until 1957, Dr.

Stokes was a visiting professor at the American University of Beirut. In 1959, Dr. Stokes retired from Syracuse and returned back to South Carolina.

During her life, Dr. Stokes participated in many professional activities. In the 1940's she was the chairman of the Southeastern Section of the Mathematical Association of America, president of the mathematical section of the South Carolina Education Association, and a member of the board of directors of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. She was also the editor-in-chief of the Pi Mu Epsilon journal when it began in 1949.

Dr. Stokes died at the age of seventy seven on August 27, 1968. She is buried at the Mountville Presbyterian Church Cemetery in Mountville, South Carolina.