

Patricia Hochschild Labalme

1927-2002

Patricia Hochschild Labalme, trustee and former executive director of the Renaissance Society of America, died in New York City on October 11, 2002, at the age of 75. Known to all as Patsy, she was not only a highly regarded scholar and teacher of Italian Renaissance history, but also a gifted administrator and tireless supporter of humanistic studies. Together with her husband, George Labalme, Jr., Treasurer of the RSA for many years, she was an important supporter of the Society's activities. But perhaps her most vibrant legacy is her incalculable contribution to the growth of Venetian studies in the English-speaking world during the last quarter-century.

Born in Manhattan where she would attend the Brearley School, Patricia Labalme graduated magna cum laude from Bryn Mawr College (1948) and went on to receive an M.A. (1950) and Ph.D. (1958) in history from Harvard University where her Radcliffe doctoral dissertation was awarded the Caroline A. Wilby Prize for "the best original work in any department." She was first student and later friend to some of the leading humanist scholars of our time. In the preface to her book, *Bernardo Giustiniani, a Venetian of the Quattrocento* (1969), based upon the thesis, she expressed her gratitude to Felix Gilbert, her professor at Bryn Mawr, who had first suggested the subject; to Myron Gilmore who directed it; and to Paul Oskar Kristeller who helped her with source material. She was particularly indebted to the late Werner Jaeger, one of her mentors at Harvard, who, she wrote, "furthered my understanding of humanism not simply as a historical concept but as an ideal and way of life nowhere more wonderfully illustrated and fulfilled than in himself." It was a lesson that continued to guide Patricia Labalme's life over the years to come.

Her teaching career was just one thread woven into a rich tapestry of a lifetime devoted to the humanities "as an ideal and way of life." She began to teach soon after earning her M.A. degree at Harvard in 1950 and continued off and on for another thirty years. From 1952 to 1959, while working on her dissertation, she taught at Wellesley College and at the Brearley School. She went on to lecture at Barnard College from 1961 to 1977, while raising four children with her husband, George, and also taught at Hunter College as an adjunct associate professor of history in 1979, and at New York University as a lecturer in 1980-82 and as an adjunct professor in 1986-87.

Her career in public service paralleled her active involvement in education, from the primary through the post-graduate level. Serving as president

of the Board of Trustees of the Brearley School (1978-82), she was also the first female trustee of the Lawrenceville School (1985-96), as well as a trustee of the American Academy in Rome (1979-99). But she made her most far-reaching contribution to fulfilling her mission to further studies in the humanities as a trustee of the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation (1979-2002), a role that she carried out with characteristic grace, wisdom, and thoughtfulness. In that capacity she was the crucial figure in the launching of the Foundation's Venetian Research Program in 1977 to support research on Venice and the Veneto by United States and British and Commonwealth scholars. Since its inception the Program has awarded more than 600 grants, and there are few scholars now working on Venetian and Veneto history and culture whose research has not received funding from it. It is no exaggeration to say that the Venetian Research Program's support of scholarship in all disciplines is the principal reason for the growth of Venetian studies during the past quarter-century, and Patricia Labalme was its architect and tireless promoter. Nor did her contribution to Venetian studies stop there. As a scholar of Venetian history herself, she was acutely aware of the structural conditions of research in Venice. In 1996 she took steps to foster them by taking a leading role in founding the American Friends of the Marciana Library, a non-profit foundation whose members' contributions have, among other services, aided in the computerized of the catalogue of Venice's famed National Library. It is safe to say that no American scholar has done as much to enhance the study of Venice in recent decades as did Patricia Labalme.

Her own scholarship, growing out of the dissertation, centered primarily upon Renaissance Venice. Her monograph on Giustiniani constituted a major advance in writing on Quattrocento Venice in its documentation, in the career of one distinguished humanist-statesman, of the organic connection between Venetian humanism and the Venetian regime. The confluence of intellectual and political currents in Venice remained a theme she pursued in subsequent writing. But she ranged into other areas as well. Publishing a number of important articles on the cult of saints, she was also an influential early contributor to the study of Venetian women. Her landmark essays from the early 1980s on women's intellectual and literary activities stimulated a rich vein of later scholarship, and her edited collection of essays, *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (1980) was the first gathering of scholarship by scholars from different disciplines on women's intellectual history in a variety of settings. Her contributions to Venetian scholarship were recognized with memberships in Ateneo Veneto and the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti. She also edited *A Century Recalled: Essays in Honor of Bryn Mawr College* (1987).

Patricia Labalme was associated with the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton for fifteen years, serving as Associate Director (1982-88) and Secretary of the Corporation (1982-92), and Assistant to the Director (1992-97). During this period she had the opportunity to work again with her old Bryn Mawr professor, Felix Gilbert, who had been Professor Emeritus at the Institute since 1975. In 1989 Gilbert embarked on a project that he had dreamed of for over three decades: to produce a single-volume translation of key texts from the *Diaries* of Marin Sanudo. In a letter sent to colleagues asking for suggestions of selections to be translated into English from the Venetian dialect, Gilbert observed that "these fifty-eight volumes show Venetian and Renaissance life in all its aspects," and asked Labalme to serve on a small committee to plan what came to be called the Sanudo Project. Gilbert died in 1991, before his initiative got off the ground, and with characteristic energy and commitment, Patsy took it on. With the institutional sponsorship of the Renaissance Society of America, she obtained funding for the volume from the National Endowment for the Humanities and worked on it for the next decade with the assistance of her collaborator, Laura Sanguineti White, Professor of Italian at Rutgers University and translator Linda Carroll, Professor of Italian at Tulane University. Entitled *Venice: "Città Excelentissima": Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, the manuscript was nearly finished at the time of Patsy's death and will be completed by White. Once published, this ambitious project will stand as a fitting memorial to a lifetime of love of Venice and unparalleled service to Venetian scholarship. In providing the riches of Sanudo's eye-witness observations on diplomacy, culture, politics, and daily life in Venice during the High Renaissance to a wider audience, this unique compendium will be a fitting – and lasting – monument to an extraordinary woman and a uniquely accomplished benefactor of the study of the Renaissance.

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