

Just Call Her "The Apple"

At an Age of 104, Constance Applebee Remains One of the "Great Ladies of Sport"

One of William and Mary's staunchest allies overseas is Constance Applebee, one of the great ladies of sports, now retired at 104 and living in her native England. She introduced field hockey to the United States in 1901.

Living alone -- she likes it that way -- in a picturesque cottage on the edge of the New Forest on the southern coast of England, Miss Applebee, "The Apple" to thousands and thousands of players through the years, cherishes her memories of happy times spent in Williamsburg with her dear friend Martha Barksdale at the College which she describes as her "favorite" of all. It had a marvelous atmosphere, just marvelous.

In 1901, when hockey was considered by many too violent an exercise for young ladies, Constance Applebee organized a demonstration of the game for students and faculty of the Summer School at Harvard. That was the beginning. Soon, invitations to Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Holyoke, Radcliffe and Bryn Mawr were extended and hockey became established in the United States.

Miss Applebee was named Director of Outdoor Sports at Bryn Mawr, retiring in 1929.

Her association with William and Mary began in 1925 when Martha Barksdale, Marguerite Wynne Roberts and her sister, Edna Clements, went to Miss Applebee's hockey camp at Mt. Pocono, Pa. Miss Applebee had started the summer camp in 1923 with 300 girls and coaches brought from England.

After more than half a century of association with William and Mary, Miss Applebee is an energetic booster and will regale visitors with the wonderful years she spent in the South. She is the major contributor to the Martha Barksdale Fund and delighted that its first recipient this year, Ginny Ramsey, is a good hockey player as well as an outstanding student.

During World War II Miss Applebee spent considerable time at the College and in Williamsburg and was an active worker for the Red Cross, U.S.O., church and other community projects. She once asked Miss Barksdale to have a "proper English tea" at her home for some English sailors who were visiting. She made mountains of sandwiches for the sailors and listened attentively to their tales of home and family and even gave them advice on the kind of undergarments they should take home to their wives.

Miss Barksdale, Miss Applebee recalls, was a real organizer. She would get everyone working and at parties for servicemen would supervise everything from the dancing to the refreshments. "She used to have me sit in a corner and talk to the older ones about their families," said Miss Applebee.

"Miss Barksdale and I had a glorious time together. Wasn't she a dear? I don't know of a kinder person, she managed everyone so well and she cared about students. She knew them all and all about their families.

"She was very strict. I remember

when she took students to play at another college they had to dress correctly and have the right shoes and gloves and all the rest of it, but the students all loved her. She knew them all from top to toe."

With the kind of gentle admonition understood between old friends she added, "I wish she hadn't let herself get so plump, the naughty thing. She was a perfectly remarkable woman and a very good hockey coach."

Miss Applebee recalled that there was a "very nice" president of William and Mary during the war years. "L. Tucker Jones was head of physical education and Miss

Barksdale worked under him.

"I remember one winter he became awfully ill with Spanish flu. Miss Barksdale became ill too but I didn't, so Martha let me go and take care of the girls and also the men who were preparing to be P.E. teachers." Many students may still remember the commanding style of Miss Applebee on the field with her brown tunic and sagging sash which demanded, and usually got, full participation from her students.

"... Dear Mr. Jones -- his death was a great loss to the college ... Mr. Jones carried the Mace and he was very proud to do that."

It was partly the influence of Mr.

Jones, Miss Applebee suggested, that turned Miss Barksdale from her studies of history to physical education.

"She was the first woman student at William and Mary, you know. She was very clever but when it came to writing a thesis she thought it a bit boring and decided to drop the whole thing and go into physical education. The history department was very furious that she had thrown over history and gone into physical education, but she did it.

"I remember Marguerite Wynne Roberts used to be in P.E. then. Later she gave it up and became a dean. And Dean Landrum, I was so fond of her.

"Althea Hunt, now she was a character. I used to help her sometimes with students. If she had someone in a play that didn't walk just right, I would take them over. She was a very interesting person.

"I never knew so many marvelous people as those at the College then. They all fit in so well, everyone seemed so happy, so devoted to the College. I think if you do work hard you get to love it, you get to be a part of the place."

In a commemorative book written by two Bryn Mawr students, Miss Barksdale wrote that Miss Applebee during her stay at the College "impressed and inspired."

"Williamsburgers continually ask, 'When is that English lady coming?' Miss Applebee has lived up several winter seasons at my house. She has lent me much of her wisdom and insight."

Champion of many causes during her lifetime, Miss Applebee has received many honors for her work in American field hockey. The 1961 National Tournament was dedicated to her as a "dedicated teacher whose warmth of personality, wealth of humor and energetic humanitarianism has set her apart as a friend of thousands."

At 83 she was described by a Christian Science Monitor reporter as still spry and contributing her own special type of talent and youthfulness to the sport of hockey.

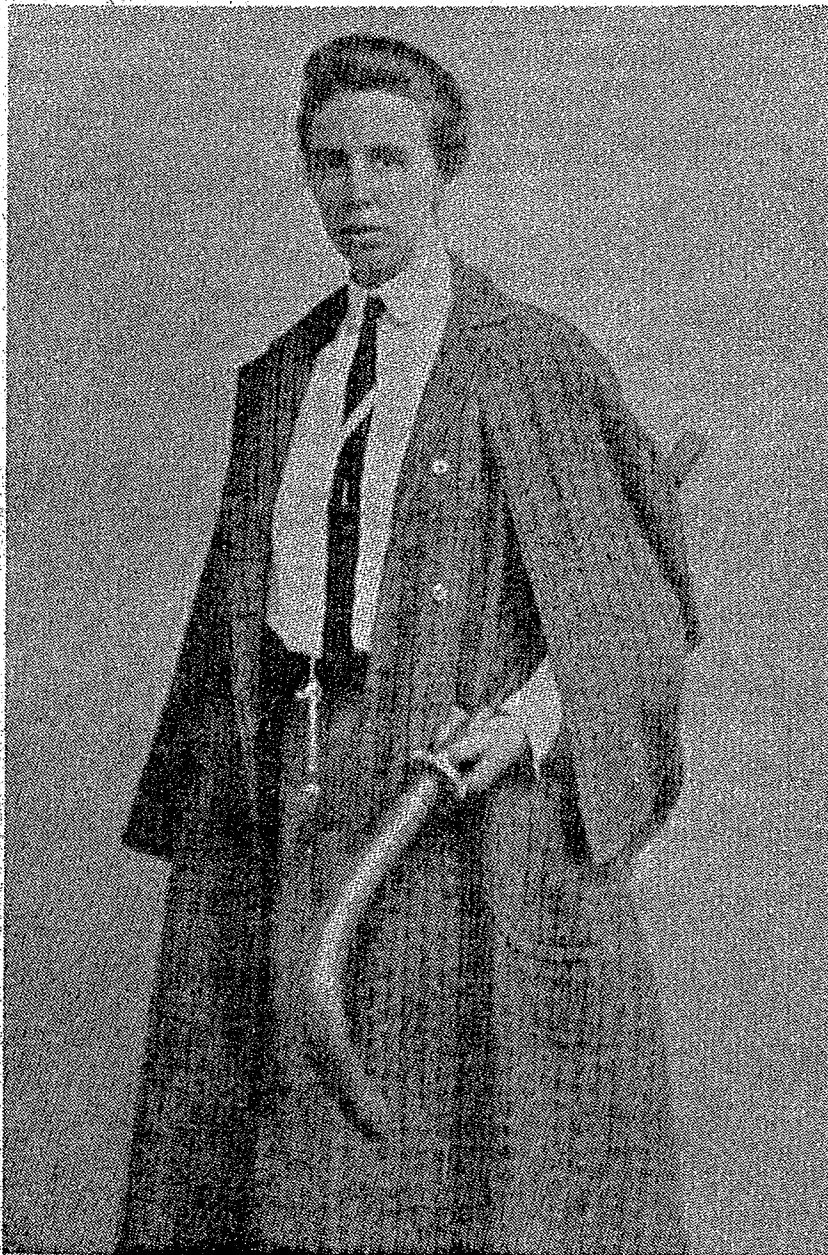
Dr. Sargent, director of the Harvard gym, was probably the first to give her praise. He wrote in a letter of introduction that Constance Applebee was "a young lady of unusual physical vigor and energy who excels in various forms of athletic sports." For a woman in 1901 that was quite a feather in her cap.

Miss Applebee lives quietly now in the lovely little English village of Burley but before she fully retired Miss Applebee organized clubs and programs for elder citizens in the village and was an active participant in community affairs.

She proudly shows visitors her set of Jefferson cups, each with a William and Mary coat of arms which were a gift from friends at the College.

Carefully placing them back in the corner cupboard in her dining room she smiled, "You know I wouldn't have missed Williamsburg out of my life for a million pounds."

—Barbara Ball



Constance Applebee