

Biographies of Dr. W. Emerson and Hazel Reck



W. Emerson Reck and Hazel January met in high school in Springfield, Ohio. They were married in 1926 after Dr. Reck had received his degree in history and political science from Wittenberg College in Springfield. They started life together in Fremont, NE where Dr. Reck had been hired as journalism teacher and public relations director at Midland College. Two daughters were born during their 14 years in Fremont-Sunny (Phyllis), now Mrs. Lew Welch of Wood River, NE and Betty, Mrs. Gabriel Lada of Westland MI

In 1940 the family moved to Hamilton, NY where Dr. Reck served as director of public relations at Colgate University. He also did some lecturing around the country. In 1946 he received a Master of Arts degree in journalism and public relations from the University of Iowa.

The Recks returned to Springfield in 1948 where he had accepted the position of Vice President of his alma mater, Wittenberg, which by then had been designated university. After 22 years in this office, he retired in 1970 but continued active in the field as a public relations specialist for Cumerford Corporation of Fort Lauderdale, FL until 1978.

During his lifetime Dr. Reck was author, co-author or editor of ten books, and authored more than 150 articles on public relations and historical subjects. A Student of Abraham Lincoln, he wrote "A. Lincoln; His Last 24 Hours" and "When the Nation Sold Farewell to Lincoln". He also served as consulting scholar for Gov. Mario Cuomo's "Lincoln on democracy" which has been published in Polish and Japanese as well as English.

Over the years Dr. Reck was an early president of American College Public Relations Association and later its historian, a charter member of the Public Relation Society of America, a founding member of the American Historical Society, and for more than 25 years a member of the boards and commissions of the United Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church of America.

He was the recipient of numerous honors for contributions to journalism, public relations, Lincolniana, the church and higher education, including an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Midland College who also renamed its Pi Delta Epsilon chapter "The W. Emerson Reck Society for Collegiate Journalists", the Medal of Honor from Wittenberg, the Lincoln Diploma of Honor from Lincoln Memorial University, and the Midlands Award for Distinction in Journalism. On his 90th birthday in 1993, Wittenberg designated a section of its Advancement Office as "The W. Emerson Reck Public Relations and Publications Suite". He was also active in the communities where he lived.

Hazel Reck was proud to be a housewife and mother, but in all three cities she called home she took part in church, college and community affairs. Included in her activities were Wittenberg Faculty Wives (of which she served as president), Garden Club, Missionary Society, Wittenberg Guild, Community Hospital Auxiliary, and served on the Boards of Directors of the League of Women voters, YWCA, Women's Town Club, and the Oesterien Children's Home. She and Dr. Reck were co-founders of their church's New Dimension program for senior citizens. The Wittenberg Alumni Association inducted Hazel to honorary membership in 1978.

The Reck's visited their daughter and family in Wood River at least once a year, and made many friends in the community. Dr. Reck gave a talk on Civil War music at the local library, and also in Grand Island as a fund raiser for Make-a-Wish.

Mrs. Reck died August 2, 1983 in Springfield. They had been married 57 years. Dr. Reck died in Ohio on August 22, 1995

Mildred was a graduate of the Wood River School in 1921 and taught in rural schools for a time after high school. She was a pianist for the Presbyterian Church in Wood River and also played piano for silent movies. She later worked in a Breda, Iowa bank and at a Savings and Loan in Omaha.

She was married to Harold O'Kane February 13, 1934, and they lived all their married life in Wood River, the last 40 years at the same residence. Her children are James D. (Father Jim) O'Kane, pastor of St. James church in Kearney and Kay E. (Mrs. Robert) Stearns of Neligh, Nebr. Her grandchildren are Michael Stearns of Lafayette, La., Sharon Stearns Anson of Alamogordo, New Mexico; Rosemary Stearns Bolling of Norfolk, Nebraska; Daniel T. Stearns of Eagle River, Alaska; David R. Stearns of Columbus, Nebraska, Mark C. Stearns of Lawrence, Kansas; and Matthew C. Stearns of Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

There are seven great-grandsons and six great-granddaughters.

Mildred enjoyed bridge games and was a crossword puzzle expert. She could laugh at herself and had a sense of humor. She will be remembered by her friends and family for her courage and positive outlook.