

Dr. June E. Baskin

South Williamsport artist's passion creates community

Lycoming County
Women



By JANET McNEIL HURLBERT
Special to the Sun-Gazette

A lifelong resident of South Williamsport, June E. Baskin (1921 — 2007) was a talented artist, a revered educator and left a lasting impact in the community.

Established in 1986, a gallery bears Baskin's name and features student art at the Williamsport Area School District Service Center.

In her honor, the Dr. June E. Baskin Art Camp, funded by one of her former students in 2006, is held annually for young artists in Lycoming County. The week focuses on a different medium each summer, with teachers volunteering their time and art supplies purchased for each student through the endowment.

Early years

Baskin was the daughter of Harry and Winona Baskin. The census tells us that her father was a streetcar operator at one time. Her mother was employed for many years at the Noll Funeral Home. As an active member of Christ Episcopal Church, Winona was noted for making church vestments and liturgical needlework.

Census records also indicate that Baskin and her two sisters grew up at 502 Main St., a home that had been in the family since 1888 and would remain Baskin's permanent address for all of her life.

Baskin did, however, spend several years away from South Williamsport. She graduated from Kutztown State Teachers College in 1949. The caption under her year-book picture shows her nickname was "Junie" and described her as "understanding" and "inspiring." Students were to remember her because of her outstanding talent as an artist and her subtle wit



and sense of humor.

Baskin continued her education with a master of fine arts from the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University in 1954 and a doctorate in art education from Pennsylvania State University.

Career

Baskin once more departed from South Williamsport while serving in the Special Services of the United States Army of Occupation, spending two years in Germany in the 1950s. On Aug. 14, 1956, according to a Williamsport Sun-Gazette interview, Baskin described her administrative position as a field craft director, training instructors to teach in the craft shops and photo labs of the Special Services program. She also supervised an automotive shop.

Baskin sailed on the ship General Rose, and she took pleasure in traveling through western Europe during her appointment, finding time to sketch, paint and take photographs.

The Army men, with whom she worked, were "comrades now that they have recovered from the shock of having a feminine supervisor."

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PHOTOS PROVIDED

June E. Baskin graduated from Kutztown State Teachers College in 1949. The caption under her year-book picture shows her nickname was "Junie" and she was described as "understanding" and "inspiring." This picture was provided from the archives at Kutztown University, at top. June E. Baskin, lifelong resident of South Williamsport, was an extraordinary calligrapher and was noted for her original Christmas cards. This card is from Kay Huffman's private collection.



Through to God
in highest heaven,
Who unto man
His Son hath given,
While angels sing
with tender mirth,
A glad new year to all the earth.
June Baskin '49
Suggested by Ca. 1440 French MS

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Baskin's local professional career lasted over 35 years and included teaching at Stevens Junior High School and Cochran Elementary School before her appointment as supervisor of art for the Williamsport Area School District. As supervisor, she was instrumental in designing the art facilities for the new Williamsport Area High School instructional studios, developing and implementing a comprehensive K-12 art curriculum, encouraging art teachers to pursue their own creative talents and establishing a workshop so teachers could make instructional aids for their classrooms.

She also developed a handwriting system called "functional italic" that built on manuscript writing and was taught in the primary grades for many years to increase the legibility of students' handwriting.

According to the South Williamsport Area Historical Collection website, the Dixie BBQ, a popular "hotspot," used to remind residents that Dr. June Baskin started her working days as a Dixie car hop. In 1945, she was employed as a teacher at the Costello

Nursery, a daycare center on Campbell Street that opened to accommodate women working in wartime occupations.

Community member

The frequent appearance of Baskin's name in the local newspaper was evidence of her wide-ranging involvement in community activities. There were talks on children's and religious arts for organizations, work as an advisor to the Stevens school magazine, preparation of posters for the AAUW Holly Trail, design of scenery for school plays and service on the dedication committee for the new high school.

Articles mentioned her memberships in the Williamsport Music Club, St. Mary's Guild for Christ Episcopal Church, American Association of University Women, Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen and Society of Scribes and Illuminators. There were also congratulatory pieces on her many honors: American Association of University Women's Woman of the Year, Pennsylvania State University Distinguished Alumnus and awards from the American Institute of Graphic Arts, to name a few.

Daughters of the American Revolution

Baskin was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She filled different roles with the organization, serving in the position of regent from 1995 to 1998. During this time, the local DAR chapter celebrated its centennial, and Baskin was recognized for her bookbinding contributions, both for the preservation of the chapter's scrapbooks and for the restoration of genealogical and historical reference books housed in the James V. Brown Library. Baskin received the Sons of the American Revolution Martha Washington Medal for giving of herself significantly to her local community.

Life as an artist

Baskin was an extraordinary calligrapher. She was noted for her original Christmas cards, which were treasured by the recipients. In one mailing, she included this statement: "For the past 25 years I have researched the Holy Ikon of Byzantium. Each year at Christmas-time it has given me so much pleasure to share with you a

significant part of this quest in celebration of the season."

A definition of an artful life is one that's filled with art you consume, art you create and art that touches hearts. Baskin's life was all three. She shares her resting place in Wildwood Cemetery with her parents. On her simple tombstone is the grave marker for the Daughters of the American Revolution, an organization dear to her. The marker is a spinning wheel surrounded by stars representing the 13 American colonies and is placed on graves to perpetuate the memory and spirit of those who have gone before. Certainly, in our community, Baskin's spirit lives on.

— *Lycoming County Women*, by Mary Sieminski and Janet Hurlbert, is a monthly column published on the second Sunday of each month in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette's Lifestyle section and is part of the Lycoming County Women's History Project. Sieminski is the former director of Pennsylvania College of Technology Library. Hurlbert is Professor Emeritus of Library Services at Lycoming College.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Baskin was a community member involved in many organizations. This picture of Baskin was provided by the Lycoming County Historical Society.