



Beta Alpha Psi Celebrates Women's History Month

An Interview with Jeannine (Skelton) McKee, our first female alumni

McKenzie Gravitt, 2020 – 2022 International Alumni Representative, Board of Directors



1950 – 1951 Miami University Omega Chapter, Beta Alpha Psi [1951 Miami *Recensio*]

Beta Alpha Psi celebrated our centennial celebration in 2019 and highlighted several of our notable alumni, including our first female alumni, Jeannine Skelton (Miami University, class of 1951). During my research for our Women's History Month social media campaign, I went in search of a photo of Jeannine on the Miami University Libraries Digital Collection and came across old copies of the Miami *Recensio*, the university yearbook. A further search led me to the school's alumni magazine, where I discovered that her married name was McKee.

And then I did what any twenty-something trying to find information a long-lost alumni would do - I headed to Facebook and found her grandson, Kevin. Kevin led me to Jeannine's son Steve, and Steve... led me to Jeannine. The now 93-year-old Mrs. Jeannine (Skelton) McKee was gracious enough to answer our interview questions posed by her son Steven. The following is a brief biography and conversation with Mrs. McKee:

Jeannine Skelton was born in 1929 in Mansfield, Ohio, where she lived with her parents and attended Mansfield City Schools. Her mother, Irene, was a homemaker, and her father, Denny, operated a radio repair shop that was in their home. Jeannine was just 13 when her beloved father died unexpectedly, and she was forced to shoulder much more responsibility around the house. Her mother went to night school to learn to be a secretary and took a job working during the day. Jeannine had to learn to cook on her own, while overseeing her younger sister.



Through this adversity, Jeannine excelled in school, and especially loved math, like her mother. She always loved mysteries, and solving math problems was like solving a mystery for her. When she entered Miami University in Oxford, Ohio she initially thought she might study architecture, but after one course she realized that her real love was math, so she took every math and statistics course that the university offered. When she ran out of math courses, she thought it was logical to start in on accounting, which she really enjoyed. After having to take on so much responsibility with her family, it wasn't hard to find the courage to take on a major where there weren't many other women.



Jeannine (left), 1948, outside her Miami University dorm

What was it like to be the only woman in most of your classes? Was it discouraging? Did you feel out of place? Did you feel a need to prove yourself to your peers or professors?

“It wasn't much different than other classes. Most of the classmates in all of my classes were friendly, and the students in my accounting classes were no exception. Therefore, I didn't feel intimidated, discouraged or out of place. I felt like I was 'just another student' who was there to learn like the others.”

How did you decide to pursue a degree in accounting?

“Because I liked math so well, and I went as far as I could in the math department, I took an accounting course, and it satisfied my desire to do math. I always liked math because it is like a mystery that you have to work out and get the answer to and find solutions. By the time I was a junior I had changed my major from math to accounting. Accounting was in the business department, so I then had to take some business courses that I wasn't really interested in. The business and government professor said, 'Anyone who can get an A in statistics can pass this course'. I almost flunked shorthand because I wasn't interested in it. You've got to be interested in what you are doing.”

What did your friends and family think about that decision?

“They were all for it because it was up to me to do what I wanted to do. My mother always encouraged me, no matter what I did.”



Where did you work and how did you use your degree? Were you the only woman in those roles as well?

“After college I worked at Dominion Electric [*Editor’s Note: now Hamilton Beach*] in the accounting department. Dominion Electric manufactured small appliances like toasters. There were two of us in the accounting department – the other was a man. I got married in my first year of work and quit after three years when we had the first of our four sons. I never went back because I was too busy taking care of four kids.

Many years later when we bought a small golf course, I took care of all the bookkeeping. That helped a lot because I didn’t have to hire an accountant to take care of my business.”

Jeannine with son Steve, grandson Cory, and great-grandsons Nolan & Nicholas



Did you have any mentors or role models?

“Not really. I was flying solo!”

Did anyone else in your family follow in your footsteps to pursue accounting?

“No. My four sons went in four different directions.”

We found some archived issues of the *Mansfield News-Journal* that listed some of your impressive golf and bowling scores...did you have any other hobbies over the years?

“Now how did they ever find stuff like that? They found my hole-in-one? My other main hobbies were reading and playing bridge.”

Do you have any advice for our current female students?

“Just do what you like. Pursue majors, occupations, and employment that you like. It is important to enjoy your work and your life.”