

1932 Wilson College Plate Series

By Dr. Wanda Finney

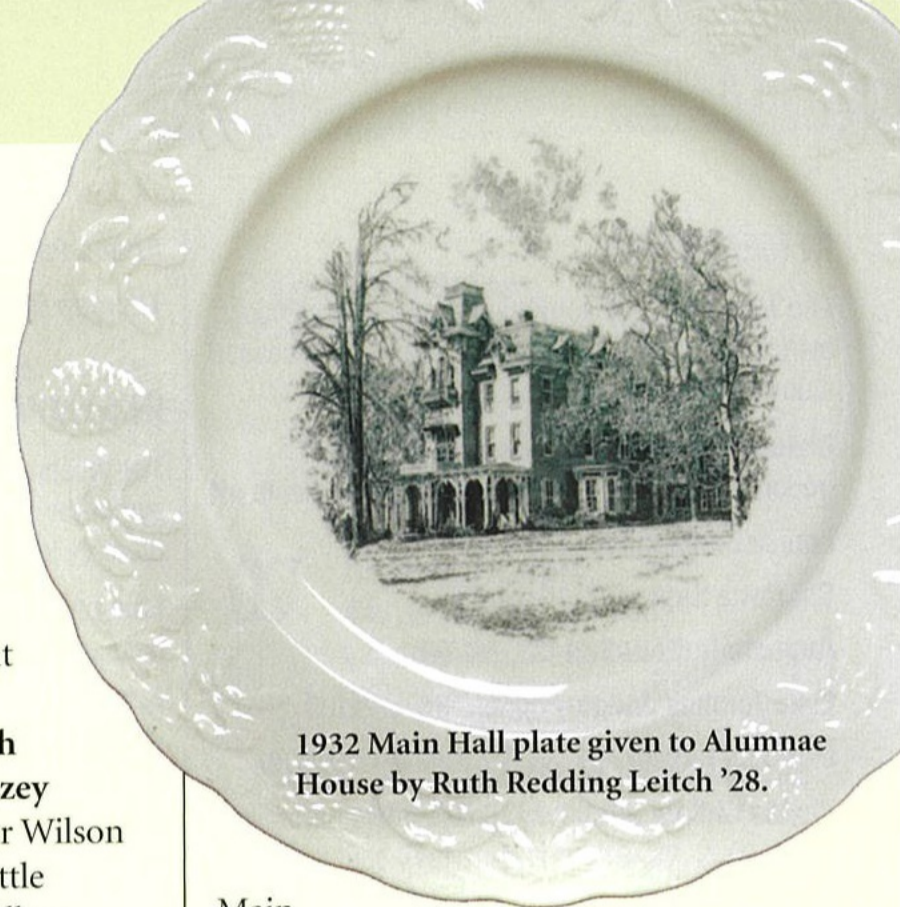
Dr. Julie Raulli, assistant professor of sociology, was curious about the history behind the Wilson College dinner plates used in a spring reception at the Hankey Center.

The dinner plates Raulli asked about were officially known as the Wilson Memorial Plates and were first offered for sale in the May 1932 *Alumnae Quarterly*: “The Alumnae Office announces the preparation of the first of a series of 12 Wilson College Plates of fine quality china, decorated with a view of Main Hall. The border is embossed with a pattern of pine needles and cones and maple leaves, prepared especially for Wilson. The plates will be produced in blue, green, black or pink and are dinner or service size, and are also attractive for buffet service or decorative purposes.....” The plates were manufactured by the Shenango Pottery Co. of New Castle, Pa. The cost was \$1.50 per plate; a dozen sold for \$15.

There is evidence in the president’s correspondence files that the “plate project” stretched back at least to the summer of 1930 when President Warfield became interested in using these items to promote the College. On Aug. 30, 1930, **Nettie Limberg Lloyd** (Class of 1897, who at the time was a Trustee) wrote Warfield enthusiastically about the plate project,

saying that she had talked with “three other alumnae of different vintages, Mrs. Montgomery [**Elsie Crandall 1893**], **Jane Pugh Thompson ’22** and **Marian Swezey ’26**. They are all enthusiastic over Wilson having Blue Plates. Some are a little doubtful about many taking a full set, but Marian says she is sure they would be welcomed as wedding presents.” In February 1931, the board approved taking an order from Jones McDuffie & Stratton of Boston, although that arrangement fell through by June 1931 when the Alumnae Trustees, to whom all matters concerning the purchase of the plates had been entrusted, recommended that the College deal with Shenango. Montgomery wrote to Warfield on June 28, 1931, that the Shenango contract “does not call for any initial payment. If it is not a success then we are out nothing, and the company is only out the advertising matter.” In November 1931, the Alumnae Association Board of Directors approved the contract with Shenango for a plate showing one view, Main Hall, with all profits from plate sales to be placed in the Alumnae Association treasury.

By August 1932, the alumnae office had sold about half the order and were encouraging alumnae to purchase the



1932 Main Hall plate given to Alumnae House by Ruth Redding Leitch '28.

Main Hall design

before they ordered more views of campus. Judging by ads in the *AQ*, the Alumnae Association tried its best to sell these plates. An illustration and ordering information for the Main Hall plate appeared in the *AQ* for February and May 1933 and in August 1933, the Alumnae Office again encouraged purchase of the Main Hall view, offering to produce three more views if 150 persons sent an order for three plates before Oct. 1, 1933. Alternate views would be chosen by vote from among Riddle, Recitation (later Warfield), Fletcher, Lortz and Thomson halls and the library. The three views receiving the most votes would be produced. The November 1933 *AQ* reported that not enough orders were taken for other views, so the Main Hall plate would be the only one sold. The *AQ* for February 1935 is the last issue that advertises these plates. Perhaps the hard times of the Depression had an effect on the ability of alumnae to purchase plates.

Some plates have eventually found their way back to the College. The Boyd Archives has one Main Hall plate in black, one in pink and seven in blue. The black plate has a typewritten note attached: “This plate was given to **Carol [Schaaf] Heppner '64** by an alum in Pittsburgh, **Mary Elizabeth Walker '30**....She got it from a friend of hers who found the plate at a yard/garage sale!...” In 2007, Mrs. John Walther donated a set of eleven pink dinner plates, previously owned by her mother-in-law, **Jane Tinney Walther '37**, specifically for use at Hankey Center receptions. One of these plates sparked Raulli’s question.

As many of you know, Dr. Wanda Finney left Wilson in July to return to teaching after 11 years of dedicated service. Dean Mary Hendrickson had this to say in her announcement to the campus community about Wanda’s departure, “Dr. Wanda Finney has served as the College Archivist since 1998, when she was hired as the College’s first professional archivist. In this role, she was instrumental in the design and oversight of the construction project that resulted in the transformation of the former president’s house into the current Hankey Center, with its excellent and relatively spacious archival facilities. Wanda has also been invaluable to faculty, who have utilized the archives as a teaching tool. Likewise, she has assisted many students who have undertaken individual research projects that rely upon documents available there. Through her efforts and influence, Wanda has assured that Wilson’s history and traditions retain a venerated place in the life of the College.”

The *Alumnae Quarterly* staff would like to thank Wanda for her service to Wilson and the *Alumnae Quarterly*—she will be missed.