



# June Drenning Holmquist

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## 1924-1982

FOR OVER 32 years the pages of this magazine have reflected the perceptive eye and critical ear of June Drenning Holmquist, who died on February 15 after a brief illness. Her career at the Minnesota Historical Society began in 1949 as assistant to Mary W. Berthel and to Bertha L. Heilbron, then editor of *Minnesota History*. June assumed full responsibility for the journal from December, 1956, until March, 1958, during which time she also directed the society's book publishing program. Throughout her subsequent work as managing editor and as the first woman to be named assistant director of the society in 1974, she continued to keep a lively hand in the magazine, writing numerous reviews and notes in her concise and admirable prose. She did not suffer fools gladly, and her insistence on clarity and accuracy has set high standards indeed for those of us who follow in her chosen field.

To a notable extent the authors and colleagues with whom she worked became her friends. We have asked some of those associated with this remarkable woman to share their memories and tributes to JDH.

Mary D. Cannon

Photograph by Elizabeth Hall

### EDITOR'S PAGE

THE Minnesota Historical Society Press, whose books are read in all 50 states and around the world, is the rich legacy June Holmquist leaves to all of us. During her 33 years at the MHS, 25 of them as head of the publications and research division, she greatly broadened and deepened the society's publications effort by dint of her strong administrative, editorial, and writing abilities. "Efficiency of mind," said W. H. Auden, "and goodness of heart are rarely combined in equal measure"; in June Holmquist they were. She typified the high professionalism that consistently motivated her. Her vision and forceful personality, as well as the forthright manner in which she freely expressed her views, contributed in a solid and enduring way to the MHS during a period of marked social change and great institutional growth. Authors and associates loved her, feared her, fought with her, respected her, and above all, learned from her. She will be missed, for she touched our lives and influenced our careers in a remarkable way. Unquestionably, she was one of the foremost builders of the society over its 133 years.

Russell W. Fridley

DURING the nearly 15 years of my association with JDH, I was her assistant editor, coauthor, managing editor, and, for an all too brief time, her "boss." From her I learned an enormous amount about what makes a good editor, a competent researcher, a "readable" writer, and an efficient administrator. She tried, I know, to teach me much more. Like all effective teachers, she emphasized the positive, freely giving compliments where they were deserved. But she would not tolerate incompetence, and when my work did not measure up, her comments — whether written or spoken — were to the point, helpful, and sometimes devastating. It gave me great pleasure to please her. It was equally satisfying to challenge her — win or lose. But most of all it was an education to work with her and to be her friend. It is a fact that our shoes were the same size. I know, however, that although I have stepped into hers, I do not fill them as she did.

Jean A. Brookins

WHEN June Drenning, newly graduated from the University of Minnesota, became an assistant to Bertha L. Heilbron and Mary W. Berthel in 1949, they quickly recognized her native gifts as a stylist and editor. June Drenning Holmquist matured professionally with the society, which she often described as a finishing school, in the best sense of the term. Her great mentors saw her more than fulfill their hopes for her. She became a fine editor, writer, and administrator. She became a teacher and friend to the staff, colleagues, and authors. She became a dauntless warrior for the principles she espoused. And in an age that often seems to foster de-personalization, she put her mark upon this institution, which in turn honors her for a legacy we all share.

*Lucile M. Kane*

I FIRST MET June at the society in 1955, and five years later she and Don helped my family to find 40 acres of farm and woodland to buy in Chisago County near their property. I learned much from June as our friend. I remember well a summer afternoon when we were painting our old farmhouse. Three sides were done, the sun hot, and the crew threatening to quit and go swimming. Then the Holmquists appeared, each brandishing a paintbrush. "Kids, you are making *real* progress!" said June, dipping in her brush and setting to work. Of course the abashed crew started painting again, and the job was soon finished. June, the editor, taught me more about the art and craft of writing than I learned in any university class, and many times, tired of endless searching, distracted by trivia, and stuck in a sinkhole of muddy language, I have been nudged on my way again by June's cheerful, "Kid, you are making *real* progress!" And suddenly, with her help, I was.

*Helen McCann White*

JUNE D. HOLMQUIST'S indomitable spirit affected the scholarship of many authors and touched the readers of numerous society publications. She helped transform my dissertation into a publishable monograph with patience, skill, and an ability to push for that extra measure of perfection. Over the decade that we were associated, she became a friend as well as an editor. My life as a historian is immeasurably richer for having worked with her.

*David A. Walker*

I KNEW June Holmquist initially as an editor who taught me the ways of historical research and composition. Later, as a member of the society's executive council, I came to respect her effectiveness as assistant director for publications and research. We were also friends who shared enthusiasm for the land and lakes, the flora and fauna of Minnesota. Editor June was a hard taskmaster; administrator June orchestrated publication

achievements for the society that are a matter of remarkable record; friend June was a woman of extraordinary breadth and perception. Her conversation was salted with wit and wisdom, and I loved every minute of it. When the authors and editors of *Women of Minnesota* gathered at my home to celebrate the book's publication, all of us associated with the project autographed each other's copies. June wrote in mine, "Thank you for a second fine book." June, thank you for many fine books, for your years of service to the Minnesota Historical Society, and for your life.

*Barbara Stuhler*

JUNE HOLMQUIST was an outstanding person. One of her most important contributions was the extent to which she bridged the gap separating professional historians from the reading public. As an editor she insistently maintained two goals that are not always easy to reconcile: sound scholarship and readability. Many of us are deeply in her debt; we learned a great deal from her.

*Carl H. Chrislock*

A NECESSARY QUALIFICATION for the "perfect" editor is a soaring intellect that encompasses the abstract and minute detail. Equally important is a personality that can be on the one hand, contentious, assertive, and blunt, and on the other, full of warmth and amiability with a charm and sense of humor that can soothe the most irate author whose blood chills at the blue-pencil markings on a manuscript too sacred to change. The broad mix of understanding, self-discipline, and the skill to influence and control are all special qualities reserved to the seasoned, creative editor.

This incomplete list of qualifications names some of those exemplified by June Holmquist. For more than 30 years I enjoyed the privilege of her friendship and at the same time watched her develop the publications program of the society. Her love of books, her sense of scholarly publishing, and her dedication to the highest standards of excellence in editing, design, and printing built an enduring monument by which she will be remembered.

She liked to tell stories about the two great editors who preceded her in the publications department — Mary Berthel and Bertha Heilbron. But one story about June that I like to remember concerned her staff and how she pointed out that standards of proofreading had slipped. She brought the proofreaders together and simply said that they could not read proof adequately while thinking about what they planned to prepare for dinner that night. The message was crisp, clear, and to the point.

As a printer, I felt a special sensitivity to her work, for she taught us all that to print a well-looking-after manuscript carefully "is indeed a very precious and lastingly important tribute."

*Irving B. Kreidberg*



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