

## Elise Hahn, Fourth Woman President of the Speech Communication Association

By Anita Taylor, from *Review of Communication*, 6(3), 177-186.

Elise Stearns graduated from UCLA in 1932 with a BA in English. She met Eugene F. Hahn, her son believes, while in college and they married sometime in the '30s. Few records are available about this time; she had no siblings and her son, also Eugene Hahn (called Gene by his friends), was born in May 1945 several months after his father died. Gene reports no concrete recollections of his mother talking about this period. Laurie Schulman, who met Elise Hahn in 1968 and shared a retirement home with her, also reports having little concrete knowledge about this period of Hahn's life. Clues can be inferred from what is known about Eugene F. Hahn.



Both Schulman and Gene Hahn believe that Elise was interested in writing during this time, and that it was Eugene F. Hahn's appointment to a faculty position in the Midwest that motivated a move from California. Gene believes that Elise wrote some musical scores as well and published them under husband's name because she didn't think they'd be published using her name. She did publish a piece in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1944; she is identified as the editor of a piece by Herbert Richard Kabat, "Bare Fists Against a Shark," that was in the November 11, 1944 issue.

It is also clear she became active as a speech clinician sometime around 1935, although certification did not occur until much later in 1953. The inference is based two sources. In her October, 1948 *Quarterly Journal of Speech (QJS)* article about the speech of first grade children, Elise Hahn comments that "the investigator" had "been engaged in voice training and speech correction with children and adults for some thirteen years. Much of her work has been in speech clinics" (34, 338). And, it seems clear she worked with Eugene F. Hahn as he moved toward an academic career in the developing field of speech therapy. According to a report of his death made to the annual meeting of the American Speech Correction Association in 1944, he was "a young man of unusual promise," who had left a position of Associate Professor at Wayne University, now Wayne State University, Detroit, to enter the Navy during World War II. The news item by Sara Stinchfield Hawk in the *Journal of Speech Disorders (JSD)*, 10, 7) reporting his death said Hahn was stationed at the Naval War College in Newport Rhode Island when he succumbed to pneumonia in November 1944 and that "Mrs. Hahn was closely associated with him in clinical work" (9, 362). These dates support the family story that his death was service related and the inference that she began working in clinical settings well before then. Other evidence points to a date of around 1935 as when she turned fully to speech training. Howard Grey, whose PhD program at UCLA was directed by Elise Hahn, when asked if he knew what occupied Elise Hahn during the 1930s, said he had the impression that she was "a protégé" of Eugene F. Hahn. Information accompanying two of Eugene Hahn's early publications (*QJS* 23, 378 and 25, 417; *JSD* 2, 87) indicate he was directing a program at the speech clinic at the University of Southern California while working on his doctorate (awarded by USC in 1940). The ASCA Membership Directory for 1944 (*JSD* 9, 79) reports that he was Director of the Speech Clinic at Wayne University, where Elise Hahn had earned her M.A. in 1942. Her thesis, from the Department of Speech Education, focused on speech improvement in the classroom.

According to Gene, the Hahns had planned a life where Eugene's professorial post was, and had purchased 4-5 acres of land in the area, intending to build a house, when a low draft number led to a Naval enlistment. While in the Navy, Eugene did a variety of speech work with officers and staff. Gene was born in April 1945, shortly after Eugene F. Hahn died in the service. Somewhere close to this time, Gene reports, Elise's mother died. Soon thereafter the young widow and infant son moved back to California where they lived with her father. Gene Hahn reports that his grandfather had been "involuntarily retired" by Bank of America at 65 and thereafter provided a great deal of the primary care for his grandson.

The exact date of the move is unclear; records show her Ph.D was earned in August 1947 from Northwestern University and that she was appointed as a lecturer in public speaking in the Department of English at UCLA 7/1/47. Her Ph.D. thesis, "The speech of first grade children in audience situations," doubtless formed the base for articles that appeared shortly thereafter in *QJS*. Elise Hahn's M.A. thesis almost certainly contributed to the several pages she wrote, "What the classroom teacher can do in speech re-education," that was indexed without a date in *The Education Index*, Vol. 6, covering July 1944-June 1947 as having been included in an NEA (National Education Association) Dept. of Elementary School Principals' publication *Role of Speech in the Elementary School*. This publication is probably based on (if not the same as, since it had the same title) the item as reported in *QJS* (35: 351) as a Speech Association of American Committee report that had been published by the Department of Elementary School Principals, National Education Association, 1947.

Records (examined and reported by Suzanne Shellaby of the UCLA Library Archives) at UCLA show that students could major in speech from 1948 until 1964, and could emphasize public address, oral interpretation or speech correction. In 1964 the speech correction program was discontinued, "but in cooperation with the Department of English, a program of study in experimental phonetics was added in its stead." Library archivist Shellaby also reports that the records show that from 1950 to 1955 Hahn had an appointment in the Psychology Clinic as well as in English, and that words describing such an appointment to the Clinic in her personnel records for 1955-1962 had been subsequently erased. In 1963 Hahn became an Associate Professor in the Dept of Speech; 63-64 she is recorded as being on LWOP. Reports from some CSULA faculty members and other contemporary colleagues indicate the departure from UCLA was unpleasant. At any rate, by 1964-65 the catalog at California State University Los Angeles (CSULA) includes her name; a note from David Sigler, an archivist at CSULA indicates she began working there in 1963.

Hahn retired from CSULA in 1977, but continued active in the profession in which she had been a leader. She was president of the California Speech-Language Hearing Association (CSHA) in 1969-70 and of the American Cleft Palate Association in 1971. In 1953 Elise Hahn had been named a "Fellow" of the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), and in 1982, ASHA voted her Honors of the Association. She was a member of the California Cleft Palate Association, the St. John's Hospital Cleft Palate Team in Santa Monica. In 1984 the CSHA awarded her Honors of the Association, an award recognizing significant contributions to CSHA and outstanding professional achievements. In 1984, the California Speech-Language Hearing Association gave her its highest award as well, Honors of the Association.

According to her son, she was especially proud of the ASHA designations, justifiably so as they recognize distinguished contributions to the field. Only 71 persons had been chosen for this honor in the 37 years between 1945 (when the first was named) and 1982. Moreover, few women are on that list. Of the 71, judging from the names, 17 at most were women; given the

ratio of all the names to those for whom sex is probably clear, the total is likely closer to 11. That is the number of names that are clearly those of women.

Gene Hahn reports that Elise did much work with Eugene F. Hahn on his publications, which include *Public Speaking Handbook*, For a Beginning Course in Public Speaking with Grafton P. Tanquary (c 1939) and *Stuttering, Significant Theories and Therapies* (c 1943), with a foreword by Sara Stinchfield Hawk; articles in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, the *Journal of Exceptional Children*, and the *Journal of Speech Disorders*. Elise Hahn prepared the second edition of the stuttering book, published in 1956, which was reviewed in *QJS* by John V. Irwin (University of Wisconsin) as a "thorough reworking of the first or 1943 edition . . . a significant addition to the literature of this field" (43, 324). In 1952, with Charles Lomas, Donald Hargis and Daniel Vandraegen (all at UCLA) she wrote, *Basic Voice Training for Speech*, part of the McGraw Hill series in speech, and which the authors described as growing out of a felt need for a text in voice training. Others of her publications are included in the appendix to this paper.

Records of her service to the Speech Association of America (the name of NCA at the time) prior to being selected president are slim. During the 1940s and '50s (and before, doubtless), reports in the "News" section of *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, later called "Shop Talk," regularly detailed actions at the then Executive Council and the annual business meetings of the association, all of which seem to have occurred during the annual convention. In either the winter or spring *QJS*, this news section always included the report of the association nominating committee. (The mode of constituting that committee changed during this period. In 1949 it was described as being elected "at the previous convention." Only later were mail ballots used to select the nominating committee). These records show that Elise Hahn was elected to a three year term on the Executive Council in December 1952 (38, 201), serving from 1953 through 1956. *QJS* reports her as a member of a "Study Committee" on Problems in the Elementary Schools, one of many study committees on "Problems in . . .". She reported for this committee in 1948 that the committee was sending questionnaires to instructors in teacher training institutions to learn what training in speech education is given (34, 507). I infer that it is this committee that prepared the report published by the NEA referred to above. She continued to be identified as a member of the Problems in Elementary Schools Committee until it apparently was discontinued with the implementation of SAA's new constitution in 1956. She is identified as a member of the "Advisory" Committee on Publications in 1955 (42, 171); as having been a member of the 1955 convention Committee on Resolutions and a member of the 1956 Committee on Committees (42, 181); she is recorded as having introduced the petition for establishment of the Speech and Hearing Disorders Interest Group at the convention in 1956 (42: 179) when many such groups were being formed in implementing the new constitution. She was reported again on the Committee on Committees in 1957, and a member of the Public Relations Committee and the Committee on Cooperation with Related Organizations (*QJS* 43, 189). In 1959 she was a member of the committee on committees, a committee on time and place (a three-year term) and on consultation (*QJS* 45. 209).

The SAA spent several years around 1950 deliberating changes in its structure, with the first committee to recommend a new structure being appointed in 1950. The new constitution, adopted in December 1954, became effective in 1956. It provided that two candidates would be named for each office and the entire membership would vote by mail ballot. Prior to this time an elected committee nominated a single candidate for each office, who was then elected, it seems, by the Executive Council, although that is not entirely clear from a reading of these records. Quite likely is that at some point the Executive Council began endorsing the Nominating Committee choices and presenting them for affirmation at a business meeting held at the annual convention. What is clear is that Hahn was the last person elected to the presidency (vice-president; that officer succeeded to the presidency) under the system of single

nominee & election at the convention. As the second vice-president in 1956, she is described as the first person to chair the new Legislative Assembly, a group of 125 (QJS, 43, 189), very much larger than the previous governing body, the Executive Council.

Loren Reid believed he was a member of the nominating committee that selected her (personal communication), although the QJS report of committee members named W. Norwood Brigance, Bower Aly, Lionel Crocker, Kenneth Hance & Orville Hitchcock (42: 171) but not Reid. As the incoming president, however, he doubtless consulted with committee members, especially given the close connections he had with these association stalwarts. Therefore, I think we can take Reid's description of committee deliberations as an accurate reflection of the thinking of the then association leadership. He notes that the committee reviewed the list of past presidents to see what regions and professional specialties were represented and "discovered right off that many of them had been from rhetoric and public address, and that speech pathology was absent from that list." Since the association then represented departments including the range of speech related study, including theatre, oral interpretation and speech pathology as well as radio and (soon) television, the absence was notable. He continued, they also "noted that the West had not had a president for a while. . . . [and] most of our presidents had been men." Reid concluded, with tongue planted firmly in cheek, "That led to the remarkable decision that we could kill three birds with one stone by selecting a woman president from the West whose field was speech pathology." Reid does not believe that two candidates were chosen at that time; he reports being "reasonably sure she was elected by acclamation at a convention." QJS records confirm at least the first part of his recollection.

As long time members of NCA recall, the association had a long tradition of holding its annual meeting between Christmas and New Year's Day. A review of the many news reports in QJS in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s finds many deliberations about location and timing of these annual meetings, reflecting much dissatisfaction with the holiday conventions. As an experiment, SAA held its 1957 convention in August (25-28) in Boston, the year that Hahn was responsible for planning the program. QJS reported that 1,205 persons attended, compared with 1615 the previous year in Chicago (in December) and 1250 the year before that, also in December (43: 353) but in Los Angeles.

Records of the American Speech Correction Association (now ASHA) show that Hahn was active in ASCA at this time as well. Reports of business at the annual meeting and other matters appeared once a year in an issue of *The Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders* until 1982 when a new format was adopted. In the late 50s Hahn served two years on a "special committee" on the organizational structure. In 1961 she was vice-president elect and vice-president in 1962. At this time records do not show that officers moved through the chairs in ASHA, nor does it appear that it was uncommon for a person elected to a vice-presidency to not subsequently be elected as president.

Elise Hahn also served as President of the California Speech-Language Hearing Association in 1969-70 and of the American Cleft Palate Association in 1971.

Association work consumed much of Elise Hahn's time (which reflects a strong interest), but it seems equally clear that being a teacher and clinician were also strong interests. Talking with a number of her students gives a strong impression that she was a powerful personality with strong interest and exceptional skill in clinical work and in training clinicians. Schumann reported watching Elise Hahn work and said that she never failed to elicit a response from a nonverbal child. The students' reports confirm an impression gained by reading the publications. Howard Grey, who started his program of study at UCLA in 1955 and earned the first PhD in the

program, said she had “a remarkable ability to involve you in her life, which was then about 80% clinician/teacher” (personal communication, July 27, 1999). Each of Hahn’s students interviewed talked of her work with clients (and watching through the one-way mirrors as they saw Hahn model the therapeutic behaviors they were learning), her interest in their lives, her willingness to share her own life with them. She is described as having time to respond to questions and listen to students. Almost all the students remember being invited to Hahn’s home for parties, and her son, Gene, mentioned these as well. Grey described these as ways of helping students “learn how to be professionals” and “who to know.” Through these events and conversations with students she would share stories of the people in the field as people, not just professors. She “offered ways to pattern yourself after a model.” Gene Hahn mentioned that on more than one occasion students stayed in her house when for some reason they were temporarily without housing.

Her teaching style did not rely on lectures, but on the modeling described above and in classes, she used a seminar approach. Students, sometimes paired sometimes individually, would do reports--papers and present them orally. Then instructor and class would discuss what was covered. She is remembered as writing extensive comments on student papers, commenting on scholarship, writing style, completeness. Students in the cleft palate class, Lisa O’Connor recalls (personal communication, 10/15/99), all developed a notebook that would include handouts, notes, assignments. Hahn reviewed the notebooks for organization and accuracy and gave students feedback accordingly. She expected students to use these notebooks for consultations when they entered their own practices and O’Connor mentions using her notebook on cleft palate for years as a reference. O’Connor and other former students also tell of being encouraged to stay in touch with Hahn and to feel free to consult with her when they encountered clinical problems for which they had some doubt about the best approach to treatment.

Without the luxury of hearing her own voice we cannot respond with a great deal of certainty to some questions about women and leadership. In an historical narrative such as this, we can answer with certainty only some of the questions posed about the lives of the women in the presidency. We can be fairly certain that, as an only child whose parental relationships later included living with her father a sustained period of time as an adult, Elise Hahn was a favored child. We know that her enrollment at UCLA at the time when few did reflected a privileged background. We can be pretty sure that her work in the speech clinics managed by her husband and later completion of an M. A. degree in the institution where he was on the faculty reflected both a strong personal drive for professional achievement on her part and an enlightened, for the time, attitude on the part of Eugene F. Hahn. Regardless of how much we can know with certainty about the degree of influence she had in his early work, to conclude it was considerable would be reasonable. It’s also obvious he was a strong influence on her work as well. Whether she was a “protégé” of his as one observer noted, or whether she was a strong minded woman who insisted he share his professional life with her may be an inappropriate dichotomy to raise. She may well have been both.

We know nothing about her activities in high school or college other than earning the degree, nor for certain anything about motivations later in life. That she had a dramatic flair and strong self-presentation seems clear from students’ testimony. We have no evidence as to where it was learned and honed. Clearly, she became strongly committed to professionalizing speech therapy and to teaching well the young people attracted to the then new field. Both goals seem obvious from her various committee involvements, both in the SAA and ASHA. We can be certain she was between 47 and 49 at the time of her election and had been active in SAA prior to her selection as President, with promoting good educational programs as one primary goal.

Nothing remains to show she had any other special projects or individual goals as president, nor have we any evidence for any intent she might have had in deciding to become president. That she presided over one of the rare not Christmas break conventions of the association before 1973 is probably an accident of timing since convention locations and dates were usually chosen well before any particular person held presidential office. This would be especially true given the process of presidential selection at that time. Without checking further records, we cannot be certain of her marital status at the time of election. We can be certain her first husband (Hahn) strongly influenced her professional life; no evidence remains to demonstrate that a subsequent marriage (which was to a man outside academe, not a long union that ended in divorce) had professional effect in her life.

From what we know about women as leaders in the 1950s, from comments by contemporaries and some younger (at the time) scholars about her nomination, we can safely infer that Elise Hahn would not have been expected to make waves in challenging the current orthodoxy of the association. She would have been expected to champion her causes of speech therapy and speech education, but that was not outside the mainstream and it's clear she had no revolutionary intent such as these goals replacing the strong rhetoric and public address focus of the discipline. Whether she would be described as a separatist (urging the soon to come separation of SCA & ASHA) cannot be determined from the records. That she served in an official liaison role between the associations after her presidency we know; what may have preceded the separation or occurred in the debates within ASHA itself we don't know—although further investigation among ASHA members or within its records might reveal more information. That she maintained positive relationships with many other women is clear. Women who were her students and some who became colleagues remained long time friends with her and speak warmly of her influence (as do many of her male students / colleagues).

To report with confidence about the climate of the association at the time of her becoming an officer requires more investigation. Clearly, it was a time of change and, probably, the cusp of even greater changes toward which some movement may already have been being felt. Certainly, not a lot of "business as usual" mood could have prevailed, given: a new constitution having been debated for several years just preceding her presidency; the growth of higher education in general and the discipline specifically that occurred during the 50s that was to increase in the 60s; and the perhaps still nascent but doubtless developing sense of unease among the many women in the field. And, since Hahn had vigorously championed one of the growth areas within the discipline struggling for its own sense of professional identity, we can safely infer that her selection as president in some way reflected a response by the elite of the association to those currents of change. It is probably not unreasonable to describe their response as an effort to "bend but not break" the traditional operating modes and philosophy of the association, to accommodate to the new, perhaps even assimilate it, without significantly changing the association itself.

Hahn become president eleven years after the last woman held the office (Magdalene Kramer in 1947) and another eleven years passed before the next (Marie Hochmuth Nichols in 1969) did so. Hochmuth Nichols' presidency occurred nine years before the next woman was elected (Jane Blankenship, president in 1978). Those facts alone support the inference that sweeping change, at least in so far as gender was concerned, was not among Hahn's goals or any immediate impact of her work. Insofar as she, the women who preceded her in the office, and her immediate female successor, i.e., the five now deceased early women presidents, all presented outstanding degrees of achievement, they presented evidence for those who claimed that the association did not discriminate against women because it could (and did) recognize women of merit by placing them in high offices. That such recognition and placement was so

rare became the basis for what is, essentially, chapter two of our story . . . that of the women who came after.

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