Resisting Hitler: Mildred Harnack and the Red Orchestra

SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAC

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RESISTING HITLER

ALSO BY SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAC

Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia (with Karl Meyer)

Resisting Hitler

Mildred Harnack and the Red Orchestra

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To Karl,
partner on the quest

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PREFACE

I first heard of Mildred Fish-Harnack through a chance encounter more than a decade ago. The occasion was a dinner for a colleague who was researching a film on the tragic and futile July 20 plot to kill Adolf Hitler. As we talked, my husband, Karl Meyer, mentioned that his family had known an American who joined the German resistance and was beheaded in 1943. My colleague had not heard of Mildred. Nor had I, the unusual circumstances of her death notwithstanding. She was the only American woman executed on Hitler's orders during the Third Reich. She was killed in secret and in wrath. Her death came in the wake of the German defeat at Stalingrad, justly considered the turning point in World War II. The Nazi high command believed that she and her husband, Arvid, bore much of the blame for the disaster.

Karl in turn had heard of her from his mother, Dorothy, who was now in her nineties, and in questioning her, this is what I learned. Mildred Fish was born in Milwaukee of pioneer Yankee stock. In the 1920s she entered the University of Wisconsin and there befriended Dorothy and her husband, Ernest L. Meyer, a columnist for the Madison *Capital Times*. Strikingly handsome, Mildred was the belle of the campus literati when she met Arvid Harnack, a German student who had come to Madison to study labor history on a Rockefeller fellowship. They canoed and hiked around Lake Mendota with the Meyers, they sipped bootleg wine and took part in student dramatics, and they wed. In due course, Arvid returned to Germany and Mildred followed, for the first time meeting her scholarly and artistic in-laws: the Harnacks and their cousins, the Delbrücks and the Bonhoeffers who were a kind

of academic royal family. The couple settled in Berlin, where Dorothy and Ernie visited them in 1932. Within a year, the Weimar Republic was dead and Hitler the unquestioned dictator of Germany. To the surprise and dismay of his American friends, Arvid became a civil servant, joined the National Socialist Party, and attained a senior post in the Ministry of Economics. When Mildred returned to America for a visit in 1937, it was generally assumed she had "gone Nazi." Only after the fall of Hitler's Reich did the truth become known.

But why, given the enormous interest in the Nazi era and World War II, did Mildred Fish-Harnack all but vanish from the history books? I began to visit West and East Berlin in order to find the answer. The Harnacks had belonged to the left-wing resistance. In West Germany, they were commonly viewed as little more than Soviet spies, whereas in East Germany, they were acclaimed as heroes, as harbingers of a future Marxist democratic republic. Fortunately, with the demise of the Cold War, it was possible to glean the far more complicated truth from long-closed intelligence archives and from interviews with Germans on both sides of the recently demolished Wall. In the pages that follow I hope to demonstrate that the Harnacks and the Red Orchestra—the name bestowed on their group by the Gestapo—belonged honorably to the anti-Nazi resistance, that the Harnacks risked their lives to provide vital information not just to the Soviet Union but also to the United States, and that they saw themselves as patriots seeking to oust from power an illegal despotism led by a fanatic and hateful usurper.

Many troves of new documents made this book possible. By filing under the Freedom of Information Act, I was able to have multiple documents pertaining to the Red Orchestra and the Harnacks—notably the so-called Gestapo Final Report—declassified, including those from the files of the CIC, CIA, FBI, and Military Intelligence. Following the turbulent events in the Soviet Union in 1991, the KGB made the Harnacks' own files available. German historians working on the trials of Red Orchestra members found new material in the military history archive in Prague. Two important caches of letters were discovered in attics. The first included nearly a hundred letters from Mildred to her mother, written in 1929–1935, recounting Hitler's rise to power and her own turn to the left. The second find was the correspondence of Martha

Dodd, the daughter of Roosevelt's ambassador to Berlin, sent after her death in Prague to the Library of Congress. Finally, with the generous help of a German diplomat, I was granted access to court records in Hanover documenting the futile efforts by survivors and relatives of the Red Orchestra victims to bring to trial their tormentor, Manfred Roeder.

I have chosen not to tell her story as a conventional biography but rather to convey it through documents and encounters with witnesses, some of them former intelligence agents, survivors who, for the most part, knew Mildred well. These witnesses sometimes disagree and offer conflicting interpretations of what they perceive as the truth. Their recollections have been filtered through a haze of half a century and the vicissitudes of Germany's occupation and division during the Cold War. Such reminiscences are often unreliable, for as Elizabeth Loftus, an expert on witnesses and their trial testimony, explains: "We interpret the past, correcting ourselves, adding bits and pieces, deleting uncomplimentary or disturbing recollections, sweeping, dusting, tidying things up." Witnesses may present things not as they were but as they should have been. Even though their accounts could not always be supported by documents, I have let them speak for themselves. Historians may desire a more critical view than I have brought to these encounters; however, I felt it important to include these firsthand recollections to convey more vividly the passions that shaped Mildred's life and times.

A NOTE TO THE READER

German speakers may wonder why I call the Rote Kapelle the Red Orchestra when a more literal translation would be the Red Chapel or Band. Because "Red Orchestra" has been used in previous books and articles on the subject, I opted for the name by which the group is commonly known in the English-speaking world. Likewise, the careful reader will also note that in the text of the book I have referred to Mildred as Fish-Harnack as she preferred to be known in Germany. However, it is Mildred Harnack Day in Wisconsin and the Mildred Harnack Oberschule in Berlin and, because it is easier to remember, that is how she appears in the title of the book.

The reader will find a list of abbreviations and a glossary of some common terms at the back of this volume.


NONNEN DAMM ALLEE
Spree
Westhafenkanal
SPANDAUER DAMM
Spree
Schulze-Boysen apartment
Olympic Stadium
SCHLOSS STR
BRÜCKEN ALLEE
BERLINER STR
BISMARCK STRASSE
KAISER DAMM
HEERSTRASSE
Charlottenburg Women's Prison
KANT STRASSE
KAISER FRIEDRICH STR
Reichskriegsgericht
KURFÜRSTEN DAMM
Teufelssee
HOHENZOLLERN DAMM
KÖNIGS WEG
Hundekehlesee
HOHENZOLLERN DAMM
WILMERSDORF
MECKLENBURGISCHE STR
BREITE STR
WIESBADENER STR
Breitenbachplatz Station
Grunewaldsee
GRUNEWALD
KRONPRINZESSINNEN WEG
Krumme Lanke
ONKEL-TOM STR
ALLEE
ALBRECHT STR
Thielplatz Station
THIEL ALLEE
Schlachtensee
ZEHLENDORF
KRONPRINZEN
Zehlendorf Cemetery (Harnack grave site)


BERLIN
1933-1943
Plötzensee Prison
Berlin-Spandaukanal
WESTHAFEN
NORDHAFEN
MULLER STR
PERLEBERGER STRASSE
BEUSSEL STR
TURM STRASSE
ALT MOABIT
INVALIDEN STR
MITTE
HUMBOLDTHAFEN
FRIEDRICH STR
University of Berlin (Friedrich Wilhelm University) and State Library
Friedrichstrasse Station
MOLTKESTR
Reichstag
Lustgarten
UNTER DEN LINDEN
Alexanderplatz
Landwehrkanal
Brandenburg Gate
Soviet Embassy
CHAUSEE
BEHREN STR
FRANZÖSSTR
CHARLOTTENBURGER
TIERGARTEN
BELLEVUE ALLEE
Economics Ministry
Potsdamer Platz
LEIPZIGER STR
TIERGARTEN STR
HARDENBERG STR
Zoo Station
American Ambassador's residence
Matthäikirchplatz (Funkabwehr headquarters)
Luftwaffe Ministry
Prinz Albrechtstrasse 8 (Gestapo Headquarters)
KANT STR
KURFÜRSTEN DAMM
KURFÜRSTEN STR
KLEIST STR
Romanisches Café
Harnack apartment (1934-42)
KÖNIGRÄTZER STR
WILHELM STR
ORANIEN STR
Anhalter Station
UHLAND STR
Berlin Abendgymnasium
Nollendorfplatz Station
BÜLOW STR
American Church
KAISER ALLEE
Sportpalast
KREUZBERG
YORCK STR
GNEISENAU STR
HASENHEIDE
GRUNEWALD STR
Victoria Park
DUDEN STR
Harnack's Hasenheide apartment (1932-34)
POTSDAMER STR
COLUMBIA DAMM
SACHSEN DAMM
TEMPELHOFER DAMM
Kuckhoff apartment
HAUPT STR
Tempelhof Airfield
GRAZER DAMM
GERMANIA STR
ALBRECHT STR
Teltowkanal
STEGLITZER STR
ATTILA STR
0 1/2 1 1 1/2 Miles
0 1/2 1 1 1/2 Kilometers

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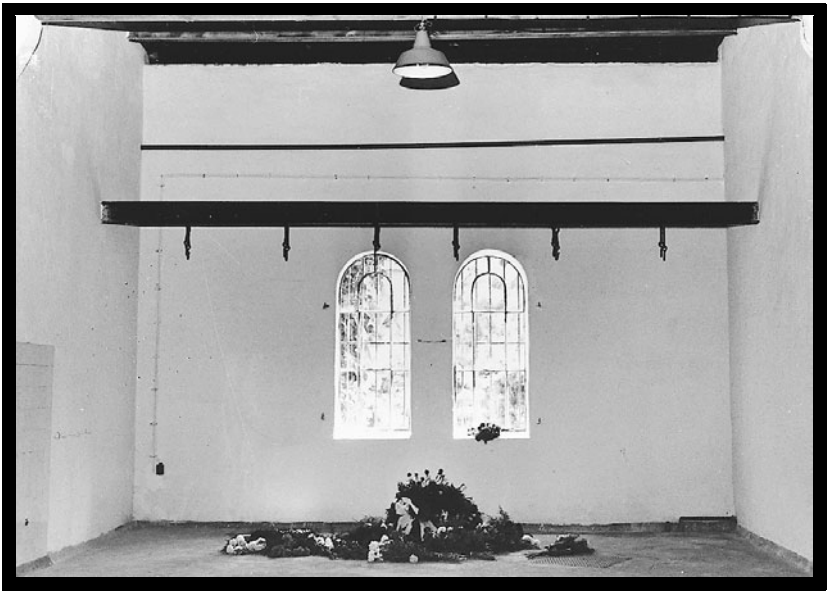
ONE

Plötzensee



Plötzensee

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On February 15, 1943, sometime after nine in the evening, a green police wagon left Charlottenburg's Women's Prison in Berlin. Making its way to Plötzensee prison, it stuttered over the rough cobblestones, pockmarked from Allied bombs. It passed by the Charlottenburg Schloss, the former home of the Prussian monarchs where, only a few hours before, young mothers wheeled babies in carriages through the gardens. When it reached the gate of the prison, the handcuffed passenger rose from the wooden bench and stepped out of the van to meet the guards who led her through the dark prison to the first-floor death cell.

The room was small, cold, dimly lit. The radiators were set into the inner wall in order to prevent suicidal inmates from bashing their heads on them. Now, in winter they gave out little heat. One lightbulb burned throughout the night so the lone prisoner could be observed. It cast its faint light on the official, who appeared to tell her that the possibility of a last-minute appeal had been denied.

The next day, as she waited for the death sentence to be carried out, Mildred Harnack-Fish spent her time drinking corn coffee, reading, and translating some lines of Goethe into English. In a fine, clear hand, she wrote in the margins of her copy of his poems her rendering of "Vermächtnis" (Bequest):

> No being can to nothing fall,
> The everlasting lives in all,
> Sustain yourself in joy with life
> Life is eternal; there are laws
> To keep the living treasures cause
> With which the worlds are rife.

She was bent over Goethe when the prison chaplain entered her cell. During the twelve-year "Third Reich," Harald Poelchau witnessed more than 1,000 executions—among them Mildred's friends in the German resistance and the leaders of the July 20 plot to kill Hitler. Poelchau noticed how ill Mildred looked. Suffering from malnutrition, tuberculosis, and, some say, torture, she looked far older than her forty years. During the five months of confinement without visitors, she had visibly withered; her once thick blond hair was thin and white.

They discussed the Bible, then Goethe. They spoke about her work. Mildred told the pastor that "if one understood a writer completely as a human being," as she believed, "it was possible to translate even the most difficult passage."

Pastor Poelchau could give her little hope but he could comfort her by describing her husband's brave end. Until now, she had not been officially informed of his death. Arvid Harnack's petition to see his wife one last time before his execution had been denied. A few hours before his death he had written two letters: one to his family, the other to Mildred. His final wish was that she should be happy when she thought of him. Arvid had spent his last hours at Plötzensee calmly reading Plato's *Defense of Socrates*. During his last visit with the pastor he asked him to read from the Bible—the story of the birth of Jesus his father had recited every Christmas. He asked the chaplain if he could hear once more the prologue in Heaven from *Faust*. Poelchau recited it from memory.

Before his execution, Arvid asked Poelchau to join him in singing the chorale, "I pray to the power of love."

That winter hundreds of thousands of German and Russian soldiers died in the snow at Stalingrad. In Berlin, Arvid died believing that Hitler's war was lost. He had no doubt that their group had been right to oppose the Nazis; by doing so they had hoped to save Germany from this catastrophe.

Although she had suffered spiritually and physically, Mildred had never left his side until their arrest. Now she appeared resigned, cut off from those around her. She had built a wall to shelter herself from further emotional pain. Only when the pastor gave her the family photographs he had smuggled into the prison and her sister-in-law's gift of an orange did her composure change. Her eyes filled with tears when she saw the picture of her mother. She kissed the picture over and over, then wrote in pencil on the back: "The face of my mother expresses everything that I want to say at this moment. This face was with me all through these last months. 16.II.43."

She held the orange—a rarity in wartime Germany—turning it round and round, wondering at its shape and color before she reluctantly ate it. She was so intimidated, so mistrustful, that Poel-

chau dared not ask her for the ring with the Harnack crest that she wore, an heirloom he wanted to save for the Harnack family. He feared she would think he wanted to steal it. Finally, as he left, she accepted the warmth of his firm handshake.

She began to read from the English Bible that Poelchau had given her. Her tears marked the verses from 1 Corinthians 13: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. . . . And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

The "shoemaker" entered her cell. He betrayed no emotion as he searched her mouth for gold fillings and exchanged her shoes for wooden clogs. He cut her hair, baring her neck for the guillotine's blade. Hands cuffed behind her back, she was led from her cell to the execution chamber between two guards. Their reward for this extra duty was a bonus ration of eight cigarettes.

The cortege crossed the courtyard to the execution chamber, which was divided in half by a black curtain. On the right, the representatives of the state sat at a table. After the identity of the prisoner was ascertained, the death sentence, "for helping to prepare high treason, showing favor to the enemy, and espionage, accused, the military court has sentenced you to death by guillotine," was read. The speaker turned to a man wearing a long black coat, white gloves, and a tall black hat, "Executioner do your duty."

The black curtain jerked open, revealing the spare white chamber. As it was winter, no light filtered through the two arched windows. In front, under the roof was the iron beam with eight meat hooks, the gallows on which Arvid had been hanged. A washbasin was attached to the left wall. On the right, barely visible in the light, was the brass and wood guillotine. At fifty-seven minutes past six o'clock in the evening, in the presence of the representative from the Justice Ministry, an official of the SS, and the chief guard, Frau Doctor Mildred Harnack-Fish, aged forty—wife of the late government official Dr. Arvid Harnack, instructor of English and American literature at the Foreign Policy Institute of Berlin University, and translator of Goethe—was beheaded. In seven seconds, as the Germans precisely determined, she was dead.

The curtain was closed. The official raised his arm in the Hitler salute and declared, "The sentence is carried out." Next to the number 2782/42 Mildred Harnack-Fish's name was entered in the *Bibliotheksbuch*, the book that recorded those executed at Plötzensee.

Meanwhile across town the prosecutor in Mildred Harnack's two trials, Manfred Roeder, caught the overnight express from the Friedrichstrasse Station. He was dispatched to Paris with orders to carry out the *Nacht und Nebel* decree against the French and Belgian resistance. Suspects were to be rounded up under the cover of night and fog, and handed over to the Gestapo; others were to vanish without a trace.

A handsome man in his early forties, Roeder was described as brutal and bereft of compassion—a man with few manners and no charm. Known by colleagues and enemies alike as "Hitler's bloodhound," he had warned the Harnack family against trying to save Mildred. He knew of her death and had no regrets. By his skillful supervision of the investigation and ruthless prosecution of the Harnack group, Roeder advanced a giant step forward in his career. In the waning years of the war he would become advocate general of the Luftwaffe. During the Third Reich, as the Austrian satirist Karl Kraus remarked, Germany, once the land of *Dichter und Denker*, poets and thinkers, had become the country of *Richter und Henker*, judges and hangmen. Yet in four years the death sentence in "the Mildred Harnack affair" would come back to haunt Manfred Roeder.

Recorded by Poelchau, Mildred's last words as the hour of her death approached were: "And I have loved Germany so much." There were no further rites. There would be no funeral. The guards put the headless body into the waiting wood basket, which was then delivered to medical students at the Anatomical Institute of Berlin University for dissection.

TWO

Transfiguration

Stamp issued by the German Democratic Republic in 1964

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By summer 1942, Operation Barbarossa, the war against the Russians, was not going well for the Germans. The early successes of Hitler's army had been followed by the shock of the Russian winter and news of a clothing shortage so severe that the army collected coats on Berlin's street corners. Then came the spring thaw. Panzer tanks and trucks bogged down in the Russian mud. However, in this third year of the war, there was one lucky break. Nazi intelligence agencies broke a Russian military code and penetrated a large Berlin resistance group headed by an official of the Reich's Economics Ministry, Arvid Harnack; a Luftwaffe first lieutenant, Harro Schulze-Boysen; and their spouses, Mildred Harnack-Fish and Libertas Schulze-Boysen.

The Gestapo moved swiftly to arrest Harro Schulze-Boysen on Monday, August 31, at his office in the Luftwaffe Ministry. One week later they seized Libertas as she fled Berlin on a southbound train the day before the Harnacks were apprehended while vacationing at a seaside resort in East Prussia. By September 12, when officers appeared at the Barandov Studios in Prague to arrest another member of the group, Adam Kuckhoff, who was making a film, eighteen other suspects, including his wife, Greta, were in custody in Berlin. On September 16, Mildred's fortieth birthday, the Gestapo took her former pupil Karl Behrens into custody. He had been fighting on the eastern front near Leningrad. Back in Berlin, twelve more suspects were being questioned. On Saturday afternoon, September 26, the Gestapo arrested Harnack's stepnephew Wolfgang Havemann at the naval intelligence school in Flensburg while additional resisters were rounded up in Hamburg. By March 1943, there had been 139 arrests in connection with the "Red Orchestra affair." One by one they were photographed profile, front, and three-quarters for the "Gestapo album"—young and old, aristocrats, intellectuals and working-class, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers.

The group had no name, but Hitler's investigators dubbed it the Rote Kapelle because the suspects stood accused of transmitting or "playing" to the Soviet Union hundreds of radio messages containing military secrets.

In the United States, the news of Mildred's death filtered slowly through the news blackout from wartime Germany. In April, the

New York Times carried a brief notice announcing the death of her husband under the heading "Von Harnack's Son Slain. Victim by Hitler's Order in Berlin Execution, British Report." The notice erroneously identified Arvid as the "son of von Harnack, noted German theologian and friend of the late Kaiser Wilhelm II." A subsequent article in May cited the official *Gazetter of the German Reich* as reporting that Mildred's estate had been confiscated: "Communistic activities are given as a reason. . . . The official announcement does not make clear whether Mrs. Harnack, wife of a German official hanged last February for treason, was also implicated in a sensational conspiracy that still awaits clarification."[1]

Mildred's hometown newspaper, the *Milwaukee Journal*, also reported on May 16 that Mrs. Harnack might be implicated in a "sensational conspiracy"[2] involving her husband and one or a dozen more Germans in an alleged plot possibly linked to a Mme. Kollontai, the Soviet ambassador in Stockholm. That day Mildred's sister Marion wrote to her twin brother, Bob, and her older sister Harriet:

> This morning while I was making the Sunday pancakes, one of our neighbors came in and I knew by the looks of her face that something was not just right. She had the *Milwaukee Journal* with her and showed us the enclosed article written about Mildred. It is too bad that Arvid is no more, and I am wondering what has become of Mildred. Tomorrow I am going to get in touch with the *Journal* and also the Red Cross and see if anything can be done to find out where and how she is.
>
> I thought I should let you know about this immediately so that if there is anything we can do, we can at least try to do it.

Mildred's sister Harriette sought the intervention of the Vatican in order to send a telegram to their "Precious Little Sister: Bob, Marion and Fred join me in assuring you the old home is waiting, and funds for your return passage when possible." In September they received a reply from the Apostolic Nunciature of Berlin stating " 'that Mrs. Mildred Harnack died in the beginning of this year and that at the apartment of Woyrschstrasse 16 there is no longer residing anyone of her family.' No other details are given

in the report. I wish to express to you and the other members of your family my heartfelt sympathies on the death of your dear sister, which will be doubly hard to bear on account of the lack of any details concerning her demise."[3]

After the war, a melodramatic note was sounded in a 1947 article, "Harnack Deaths Covered Trail of German Hoard," in the *Washington Evening Star*: "When Hitler ordered the beheading of Mrs. Mildred Fish Harnack of Washington, and her husband, he sealed forever the lips of the two living persons who could bare the trail of $300,000,000 in hidden German assets in America," said a high Justice Department official identified as Harry LeRoy Jones, assistant to the alien property custodian. Arvid Harnack, according to this official, knew all the intricacies of the fabulous and far-flung I.G. Farbenindustrie, Germany's chemical giant, including its cartel arrangements and foreign investments. Jones added that the Treasury Department had looked forward to having Harnack appear as a witness at hearings to discover the wealth that Nazis had camouflaged abroad, particularly in the United States. When he and his wife were executed, the opportunity was lost: "Hitler's ghastly personal fear that hidden Nazi hoards might be bared by Mrs. Harnack was manifested when he personally ordered her guillotined after examining the record of her trial as an anti-Nazi and re-opening of her case."[4]

That same year, The *Washington Post* reported on a memorial service held by the Daughters of the American Revolution at Constitutional Hall. The then president general of the DAR, Mrs. Roscoe C. O'Byrne, eulogized their former member, the secretary of the Berlin chapter, describing Mildred with more enthusiasm than information as having typified "the sterner stuff of which Daughters of the American Revolution are made."[5]

Finally in December 1947, the most complete account of Mildred's death appeared in the University of Wisconsin *Alumnus*. The magazine described Mildred as "the only American-born woman to be executed by the Gestapo" and as "a patron saint of resurgent German liberalism." The story mentioned the Harnacks' visits to the United States in 1937 when acquaintances scorned the couple, interpreting their silence as pro-Nazi loyalty. The article refers to the anti-Nazi Red Orchestra by name, although nowhere

does the article state that they beamed the transmissions of their secret radios at the Soviet Union. According to the magazine, the Red Orchestra numbered over six hundred members, including one sequestered in the wire room of Hitler's headquarters and another concealed among the Luftwaffe's top staff.

As described in the article, based on material provided by her German sister-in-law, Inge Havemann, Mildred Harnack was much more than the Red Orchestra leader's wife. For her husband she typed and distributed leaflets, maintained contact with other members, and arranged secret meetings. Using her position as literary advise to a Berlin book publishing firm as an excuse for her frequent travels, she maintained liaisons with the various branches of a nationwide resistance movement. So secret were the details that members of this network often did not know the others were anti-Nazi until they met in prison.

Further on in this account, we have Hitler thumbing through the court records, coming across Mildred's dossier, and immediately ordering her case reopened. Hitler set in motion the procedure that launched a second trial: "As the only American in his power" she became "the target for his hatred of this country."

At war's end, the U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) began to investigate the case of Mildred Harnack-Fish and in November 1946, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began its own file. Most of these documents were not declassified until 1998. The most interesting items are cross-referenced from the file of Martha Dodd Stern, the daughter of a former U.S. ambassador to Berlin. By 1948, the FBI had Stern under surveillance as a suspected Communist. In a letter intercepted by the FBI, Martha writes:

> I have been sent some truly wonderful material about M[ildred] and A[rvid] and their calvary in Germany. I hope to make an article out of it. A. got thumb and joint screws and God knows what else. M. had to witness his slow death by hanging (they did it on a 12 inch rope) or some such horrible method of slow strangulation, practically a crucifixion. She had an ectopic pregnancy when she went to prison and got no medical care. They tortured her almost to death.

> Her hair turned white, she became lame had tuberculosis and all sorts of other horrors before they decided to put her out of her misery on the chopping block.[6]

As the Cold War divided Europe and the Soviet Union strengthened its grip on Eastern Europe, the newly organized Central Intelligence Agency joined the pursuit. It hoped to identify survivors of the group who, having eluded capture or death sentences, might be still active in the Soviet intelligence services. The CIA kept a secret file on the Rote Kapelle, compiled in book form in 1973, based on captured Gestapo documents and allied postwar interrogations of German intelligence personnel. Under the Freedom of Information Act passed by Congress in the wake of Watergate, the government released the documents in 1976. The short entry on Mildred reads:

> Mildred Elizabeth HARNACK nee FISH was born about 1902 in the United States. An American citizen, she was in the 1920s a student at the University of Wisconsin when she met HARNACK. She returned with him to Germany, where they both taught economics and philosophy. She was in sympathy with her husband's devotion to Communism. In 1939 she lectured at Berlin University and the Foreign Office. She participated in her husband's clandestine activities and was executed on 16 February 1943.

The rest of the file contains some information from a book, *Treason in the Twentieth Century*, by the German journalist Margret Boveri:

> Louis LOCHNER [the Berlin correspondent of the Associated Press] . . . came into contact regularly at the meetings of the German-American Chamber of Commerce, of which he was president—with Arvid von HARNACK, who had the American desk at the Ministry of Economics and whose wife, Mildred FISH HARNACK, was one of the most prominent American women in Berlin society. She helped Martha DODD [Mrs. Alfred K. STERN] organize those now legendary tea parties which were such social events in Berlin in the 1930s. The assumption that one of the codes which

> LOCHNER bore concealed on his person upon his return to the U.S. originated from the Rote Kapelle is far from fantastic.[7]

As early as January 1946, as the Nuremberg tribunal was convening, an official inquiry into the death of Mildred Harnack was opened by the War Crimes Group of the U.S. Army. File number 12-2262 was declassified in 1990. It reads: "February 21, 1946: Mrs. Harnack had dual German-American citizenship. It is quite possible that investigation will disclose the commission of a war crime and might develop considerable interesting information." What was the war crime Mildred's prosecutors were deemed to have committed? "O-27 = Denial of due process."[8]

Nine months later the army changed its mind.

On November 21, 1946, the army investigation determined that both Harnacks were "very deeply involved in anti-Nazi underground activities in Germany" and that "both were tried and found guilty of high treason and executed."

A further paragraph, in a letter to Captain Sloan of the War Crimes Group, elaborates:

> While Mildred HARNACK's actions are laudable and while she was an American citizen, she was plotting against the German government, was given a trial and there appears to be sufficient justification for imposition of the death sentence. Your advice is requested whether War Crimes Group has jurisdiction to try such a case. Upon receipt of your reply we will either forward our already rather extensive file to you or continue with the investigation.[9]

January 15, 1947. Lt. Colonel Ellis, chief of the evidence branch of the War Crimes Group, replies, "This case is classified S/R [special reference] and should *not have been* referred for investigation. Withdraw case from Detachment 'D' and *do not* continue the investigation."[10]

With this, the army closed its files.

THREE

Chum

Mildred, Washington, D.C., 1918

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Better not write but don't forget me," Mildred Harnack wrote on a last postcard from London to her friend and former classmate Clara Leiser. Clara Leiser never forgot Mildred Harnack. No one who knew her ever forgot her, as I quickly learned. Replying to my telephone call asking if she remembered Arvid Harnack's wife, Hazel Rice Briggs paused, thought back to encounters sixty-four years ago, and replied, "Mildred Harnack was the most beautiful girl I ever saw." Another classmate's memory was of a "brilliant student, very self-assured," with a "swanlike neck" who exhibited her individuality by "wearing long, straight hair when most of us were trying out permanents," a sort of pre-Raphaelite beauty. "Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* combined with the movie star sexiness of Veronica Lake." A fellow aspiring journalist on the *Wisconsin Literary Magazine*, Mady Emmerling Knowles, broke the stillness of our late afternoon tea: "I can still hear her voice. Can't *you* hear her voice?" Nonagenarian Dorothy Meyer's face lit up when she described the dramatic effect that Mildred's braids produced against the black velvet robe she wore as a young housewife in Berlin. The Meyers' one visit to the Harnacks' apartment took place on a European trip in August 1932.

My biographer's query in the *New York Times Book Review* elicited a letter from Ann Arbor, Michigan. The four-line notice with Mildred's name at the bottom of a page stirred up Elizabeth Fine's memory of a spring day at the University of Wisconsin, when Professor Laird's beginning Greek class heard Mildred, then a graduate student, recite the first hundred lines of the *Iliad* by heart—in Greek. A former high school beau, emeritus Harvard geophysics professor Francis Birch, sent a picture, carefully preserved after all these years.

The Germans who knew her described a nobility of character and other steadfast qualities, comparing her to Gretchen from *Faust*, to the thirteenth-century sculpture Uta of Naumburg, and to Senta in Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*. Unable to hold back her tears, Edith Reindl recalled the first time they met. "Mildred wore a simple blue dress. She had a radiant face and beautiful blond hair that she wore in a knot. As she entered on the arm of her husband, I said, 'this woman looks very charming. I would like to know her better.' " The two Berliners used to go for rides,

Mildred's loose hair blowing in the wind as she stood up, Isadora Duncan fashion, in the back of the Reindl's fast-moving open roadster. Rudolf Heberle met Mildred first in Wisconsin when she was "*the* campus beauty." He noted her strong gaze and proud bearing. "She strode while most women tripped," Heberle wrote in a 1946 letter to Ricarda Huch, which I found in a Munich archive. "We walked in the woods, wandered," he records, "and Mildred read us poetry." Professor Hugo Munsterberg confessed to staring at her from across the room: "Every young man was in love with her. I remember some lectures she gave on American literature at the American Women's Club . . . Mildred's husband was from one of Berlin's most illustrious families and she—she was a woman of extraordinary beauty—moved in literary circles."

In fact, the young Mildred yearned to be remarkable. She was theatrical: she loved to act, recite out loud, strike a pose, stand out in any crowd. She's the one girl who tilts her head in the high school pictures. She's the one coed photographed in profile for the 1925 Wisconsin *Badger Yearbook*. Even her last photograph, taken shortly after her arrest, number 228 from the Gestapo files, shows the now defiant eyes, the resolve around the mouth. Here is someone determined to go down in history boldly.

Those who knew Mildred well find it hard to believe she was a spy. "The Mildred I knew would have been in the resistance, she would not spy," says Dorothy Whipple Clague, formerly a Wisconsin radical and now a retired Washington pediatrician. How can this innocence, this boldness, this willingness to capture the attention of a room be reconciled with the traits necessary for a life of secrecy?

When Mildred Harnack returned to Germany after a 1937 visit to the United States, she left behind for safekeeping fragments of an autobiographical novel. These seventy-one pages, neatly typed in brown folders, survived the vicissitudes of World War II in the care of a professor of German, Friedrich Bruns. In an introductory passage, she describes her novel rhapsodically as one "of strong contrasts: It concerns resolution and will, age and bitter disappointment, deprived youth, and also youth in its mistakes and in its exquisite fulfillment of friendship." In her novel Mildred pro-

poses to trace the "development of a family of the lower middle class in a city in the Middle West in the years 1915 to 1918."[1]

This midwestern city was Milwaukee, where Mildred Elizabeth Fish was born on September 16, 1902. Nowadays, Milwaukee is a blue-collar town fallen on hard times. Its tanneries have been boarded over and its breweries closed down. The aroma of leather and hops no longer permeates the air. It's hard to tell whether Mildred's old neighborhood is coming up or going down, since so many vacant lots have replaced her former haunts. The German-speaking families who lived immediately north of Wisconsin Avenue, where Mildred was raised, have been replaced by Southeast Asian immigrants. Her birthplace on Grand, razed long ago, has become the parking lot for the Marshall and Illsley Bank.

Yet in the closing years of the last century, migrants from Central Europe had transformed Milwaukee from a Yankee frontier town into a sophisticated metropolis, described by its boastful burghers as the "German Athens on Lake Michigan." In 1902, three out of four Milwaukeeans were of German descent; in the North and West End, where they settled, store advertisements read: "Hier wird Englisch gesprochen." Milwaukee's Germans established music academies, art institutes, and lending libraries. Fine public parks displayed statues of von Steuben, Goethe, Schiller, and a Teutonic-looking Robert Burns. The immigrants' interests were musical and literary. Irish maids dusted parlors with Steinways and Chickerings bedecked with plaster of paris or marble busts of Beethoven and Mozart. Yet these new Americans viewed culture ecumenically: colored prints of America's six great poets—Emerson and Whitman, Bryant and Whittier, Lowell and Longfellow—hung two by two over heavy carved-oak mantels. Masterpieces of Schiller and Shakespeare stood alongside *Der Hund von Baskerville* by Arthur Conan Doyle, translated by Georg Meyer, a local newspaper editor.

Weekdays, *Stammtisch* regulars—actors and painters, professors and doctors, brewers and bankers—assembled for black *Kaffee* and butter *Kuchen* around their reserved table at Martini's. The blackened wooden rack behind the huge glowing stove of the *Kaffeehaus* held the twelve Milwaukee newspapers, seven of them in the *Muttersprache*, German. One of them, the *Germania*,

featured a column written by "Philip Sauerampfer" in the local dialect, Milwaukee-Deutsch ("Die Cow hat über die Fence geyumpt"). There were local features on the nearly one hundred *Gesangverein*, choral societies to which everybody belonged whether they could sing or not, and reviews of the Wednesday night performances of the German repertory company at the Pabst Theater. In summer, drinking songs echoed between *Biergartens* as steins passed hand to hand. In Schlitz Park, children played to the wheezy tunes of the carousel pulled by a brewery-wagon horse. Looking back on Milwaukee's halcyon years, Mildred's lifelong friend, columnist Ernest Meyer, wrote, "An indefinable easy-going gemütlichkeit flowed like a quiet stream through the life of the city."[2]

German immigration favored the west side: the Deutscher Klub was there, the Turner Hall, where Papa Brosius taught *die Jungen* gymnastics on Saturday morning, was there. During the nineteenth century, the aptly named Grand Avenue attracted Milwaukee's brewery aristocracy who built their palatial homes along it. However, by the time Mildred was born, the brewery barons—Pabst, Miller, and Schlitz—had begun to abandon their brick and stone mansions in the sixteenth ward for Rhenish castles along Lake Michigan. Then a thrifty new class of citizens, who did not mind the noise and danger of the streetcar, took their places. These middle-class burghers would rent out rooms and vote in socialist mayors.

Because Mildred Fish began her life in a city nearly as German as the city where she would end it, Berlin posthumous press accounts assumed that Mildred was German-American or Jewish. In fact, the Fish family came from old Yankee stock.

In her 1936 application for membership in Berlin's Dorothea von Steuben chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Mildred traced her lineage back to one John Fish. This ancestor received wages as a private in Captain Christopher Manchester's company of Rhode Island Minutemen. John Fish was the great-grandson of Thomas Fish, who emigrated from England in 1642, becoming one of the earliest settlers and founders of the state of Rhode Island. The Rhode Island Fishes were the parvenus; the more illustrious Massachusetts branch, which intermarried with the Stuyvesants and Schuylers, came over on the *Increase* in 1635.

It was these Fishes, the most prominent among them, a member of New York's "Four Hundred," Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, that produced generations of Hamilton Fishes, one of whom was the congressman who once headed the House Committee on Un-American Activities. While Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish was giving her celebrated parties—one featured a guest of honor announced as the Prince del Drago but really a monkey in full evening dress—other Fishes advanced north and west, becoming yeoman farmers in Wisconsin, Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and Canada. Charles Henry Fish, Mildred's grandfather, moved from Franklin, Connecticut, to Arcadia, New York, to Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, where he worked as a blacksmith. His only son, Mildred's father, William Cooke Fish, was born in "the Falls" in 1856. William attended a normal school studying to be a teacher but, in a pattern he would repeat throughout his life, lost interest and dropped out.

Her mother's family, the Hesketh, were English Protestants. In later years, Mildred traced her own predilection for radical views to a nonconformist ancestor. This minister, against the custom of his time, took his daughter with him while he preached sermons alongside John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Mildred's maternal grandparents left Lancashire in England's industrial north with a group of relatives, arriving in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. When they reached Wisconsin, they joined the first wave of settlers in the town of Hartford near Milwaukee. Here her grandfather, William Henry Hesketh, served as schoolteacher and postmaster. He had one son and seven daughters, six of them by his English wife, Jane Hilton, the last by an American wife. Mildred's mother, Georgina, the fourth in line, was born on December 22, 1865.

Georgina was ambitious. While still a teenager, she taught school, learned typewriting and shorthand, and moved with two sisters to Milwaukee. There she fell in love with the handsome young man who wrote with a fine Spencerian hand. Looking through pictures in the family album years later, his eldest daughter Harriette described William Fish as a "dashing figure, with the waxed moustache affected by the blades of the period." With his fashionable clothes, his flashing eyes, and his confident pose, William "was no country bumpkin."[3]

In 1893, after a four-year courtship, Georgina and William

married. She was three months pregnant; a daughter, Harriette, was born six months later. It would be agreeable to say that William settled down. He did not. By reputation, he was a "sporting man," a lady-killer who liked horses. His story was the antithesis of the American Dream, in which material success rewards hard work. Lowering himself, as it were, by his bootstraps, he descended from profession to odd job: schoolteacher, insurance agent, salesman, clerk, horse trader. He objected to taking orders and was easily bored. A jack of no trades, his daughter put it bluntly, "He lacked persistence and application."

Georgina consoled herself with her four children: Harriette, the twins Marion and Marbeau (Bob), born in 1895, and Mildred who was born in 1902, when Georgina was thirty-six. She was an afterthought, probably an accident. Family legend says hers was an easy birth, which Georgina attributed to her study of Christian Science.

At a time when the young died before the old from now forgotten epidemics—polio, diphtheria, typhoid fever, smallpox—funerals for children were an everyday occurrence. A new religion, Christian Science, offered hope, the possibility of controlling the uncontrollable, the triumph of spiritual power over everyday feelings of impotence. Founded by an independent-minded woman, Mary Baker Eddy, "Science" avowed the sexual equality and duality of a Father-Mother God, which accounts in part for its appeal to many women and only some men. "Science" won large numbers of converts in the early years of this century, especially in Milwaukee. Georgina herself was an awed witness to two "healings"; nephew Charles recovered from polio and a friend's daughter survived "brain fever."

A strong and self-reliant person, Georgina became a lifelong adherent and sometime practitioner of Christian Science. She organized her week around her children, Wednesday night testimonial meetings, and Sunday services. Mildred and the twins—Harriette was already at university—struggled over their daily lessons with titles such as Ancient and Modern Necromancy alias Mesmerism and Hypnotism Denounced. They searched and found answers to questions like, Are Sin, Disease, and Death Real? At week's end, dressed up in beribboned hats and high-buttoned shoes, they made the long trip downtown by streetcar to Sunday school classes.

"She was a great pip, a pet of all the rest of the family. We were all very fond of her and played with her a lot," Mildred's oldest sister recalled. Her memories of Mildred, recorded in a 1987 interview, were decidedly sparse. Reading through the transcript, I remembered other lines of Harriette's that struck a decidedly discordant note. Harriette had written to Mildred's friend, Clara Leiser, "We ought not to sanctify Mildred. She never thought of anyone but herself!"[4]

From Harriette's diary we can reconstruct their childhood. Seasons were marked by the flooding of the yard for skating or bobsled rides down Booth Street Hill in winter, swimming in the Milwaukee River or outings in Mitchell Park rowboats in summer. On summer vacation visits to relatives on farms, Mildred gathered sweet corn in bushel baskets and watched while her aunt churned butter and her uncle played with the kittens on the back stoop. Fall was escorted in by the mounted police, who led the Labor Day parade, an event universally attended in this trade union citadel. For Milwaukee children, this was a time when following a horse-drawn fire engine or sighting the matched team of Percheron greys pulling the Pabst brewery wagon was worthy of a diary mention or a school theme. Real treats were going by Schuster's Department Store for school supplies and birthday presents, taking nickel elephant rides on Countess Heinie in the Milwaukee Zoo, lining up for the annual automobile parade, and setting off firecrackers on the Fourth of July.

It should have been a very pleasant life, but the depression that began in the 1890s climaxed in the panic year of 1907. Crops failed, murrain took the cattle, mortgages went unpaid, businesses bottomed up, and there was the ever-present threat of fires. Winters were cold and open fireplaces and stoves provided heat and oil lamps, light. Lightning struck granaries. William's insurance business should have flourished but in those days, when people set fires for profit as well as pleasure, he failed again and again to provide for the family.

The Fishes rented out rooms and took in boarders, but local directories show that they moved nearly every year to different houses in the same neighborhood when they could not pay their rent. The houses were all near Grand (now Wisconsin Avenue) so that William could stable his horses in the abandoned barns as the more affluent people acquired motorcars. Her mother, Mildred

wrote, was wrinkled and worn by the time her last daughter was born. Gradually, she distanced herself from a husband who proved unfaithful and incapable of supporting his family.

An interesting thing about the Fishes is that there are no posed family photographs: no father in stiff white collar; no mother seated, baby on lap, in her Sunday satin dress, no boy in short pants, no girls with ribbons in their hair. Family portraits give an impression of solidarity that the Fish family never achieved. Certainly William and Georgina were mismatched. She quoted the Bible; he was devoted to Wild West stories. When Mildred was twelve, they separated. For a brief period in 1915, Mildred and her mother went to live in Madison, Wisconsin, with Georgina's sister, Laura. From Mildred's writings, it appears this was a bold attempt at independence that failed. Why they returned to Milwaukee is unclear, but return they did. Her parents, Mildred wrote, could not resolve their differences "between the man's world of the chisel, iron vise, and stable smells" and "a woman's world of longing."[5] Her mother's preoccupation with "Science" widened the gulf; her father was alienated by a religion that "cultivated tenderness instead of warmth," that emphasized the transcendence of Spirit over the earthly pleasures of the flesh.[6] William thought his youngest daughter strange and mistrustful. The objects of his gruff affection—and anger—were not his children but his horses and dogs. With the help of second daughter Marion, Georgina supported the downwardly mobile family with odd domestic chores. One day, it is not exactly clear when, William was finally "cast out."

If William was a common man, Georgina was an exceptional woman. She held the family together, supported her children financially, encouraged them in their ambitions, and saw that they were well educated. Georgina taught her children never to be afraid and her daughter felt that this deep-rooted attitude had much to do with shaping her later life. If there was something they wanted to do—attend college, for example—Georgina allowed no obstruction to stand in their way. Mildred attributed her own considerable strength of character to her mother, "the first and almost fundamental creative force" in her life. Georgina gave her daughter "truth, strength and delicacy of feeling" through "mutual love." From Germany, in the crisis year 1933, Mildred wrote that she

had learned "how to use these qualities productively and not let unproductive forces destroy them."[7]

She would remember the awkwardness and desolation of family life together, which she characterized as "a certain materialization of tragedy." Still, although her literary reconstructions of her youth are often bleak, her recollections of her formative years in letters to her mother assume a rosy glow. In a 1931 letter to Georgina, Mildred writes about an encounter with a friend who remarked, "You are very fortunate, for you had a happy childhood. One can tell that from a certain quietness and trust in you." Mildred replied that her childhood had been very happy because of her mother, who, "in spite of her very difficult life had always remained inwardly quiet and strong."[8] Privately, however, Mildred became progressively doubtful about Christian Science. She described herself as an "unconscious unbeliever in Sunday School and religious names." Perhaps because she knew it was a source of parental conflict, she spoke of God and religion unwillingly. Nevertheless, her early exposure to Science left its mark. Ever inclined to view her fellow humans optimistically—often despite contrary evidence—she believed in their redemption once they learned the truth.

Mildred wrote her sketch for a novel in the 1930s. It portrays a sensitive, poetically gifted young adolescent, intensely aware of class distinctions. Her story is melodramatic; her heroines "ache," "dream," and "long," and one of them, Magda, dies of consumption. They have injured pride and are susceptible to the snubs of those "who have dreams of rising in the world." They, like Mildred, are isolated, outcast, keenly aware of being poor in a well-off neighborhood. Friends cannot be invited home because of shabby surroundings. There are crises of birthdays and other parties with no proper gifts. Even when called by different names—Dorothy, Eula—her heroines are all Mildred, thinly disguised, scantily fed, and clothed in hand-me-downs. Although she never longed to be rich, she despaired of being poor.

In her novel, Mildred writes of many girlfriends but has only one best friend. Intensely loyal, Mildred feels guilty when she abandons her first friend, an older girl who shares her poverty and literary interests, for another named Grace. Her lack of courage

in standing by her chum haunts Mili, as Mildred's Milwaukee friends called her, and although she does not share her classmates' snobbery, she succumbs to Grace's physical beauty.

Grace and Mili become as close as only teenage girls can be. A year ahead in school, Grace inhabits a different social stratum. Mili loves the "simple luxury and harmony of Grace's home"[9] provided by the father who is a successful commercial traveler. Grace is beautiful, as tall and dark as Mili is tall and fair. Mili calls her the Egyptian princess. They imagine themselves Siamese twins and braid their brown and gold hair together on the way home from school.

Discussions of the naked Indian boy who wrote love letters in Maria Evans's books about the Hopi Indians arouse their sexuality. They flirt with the possibility of emulating the nude brown bodies, but the two girls only go as far as dancing in bare feet. On the great parlor sofa, they read the farm poems of James Whitcomb Riley, liking "the swing, the lilt of them, the easy way in which they ran along."[10] They talk about boys and school but are happiest when left alone together. Attending plays at the Pabst Theater, they wear roses not to attract the attention of young men but in the hope that some of the mystery and glamour of the flowers may rub off on them. In the idyllic future they plan, Grace is to play Galahad to Mili's Guinevere, one to paint, the other to write. "Old maids" together with cat, canary, and simmering teapot, they would live "in a white frame house on a green bank." Grace's mother said to Mildred, "If you had been a man, I know who would have married Grace." Years later, Mildred admitted, "She was right."[11]

Who was Grace? I wondered. Could she still be alive?

Margaret Emmerling Knowles answered my query in the New York Times Book Review. *She did not know if she could help as her memories were "somewhat misty." However, she wrote, "I can still hear her voice and see her face." I calculated "Mady" must be nearing ninety but her posture was remarkable. She did not wear glasses. Her hearing was good, her conversation free from complaints about the infirmities of old age. After college in Wisconsin, she had become a sports reporter on a Philadelphia newspaper. Mady Emmerling knew Mili in Milwaukee and was willing to tell me what she remembered, what remained:*

"I just remember her as an open-eyed, almost open-mouthed, eager, observing person, always taking things in. She had a lovely voice and liked to read poetry out loud . . . When I met Mili, I was in my teens. She and my friend across the street who were friends, real *friends, went to the public high school. I didn't. But I used to walk around the block with them in the evening, that kind of thing. She was really a close friend of Grace Carlsruh's and that's how I got acquainted with her."*

Mady kept up with Grace. They exchanged cards at Christmas but she had not heard from her in a couple of years and did not know whether she still was alive. She would look for her address.

Three weeks later Mady Emmerling sent a card with Grace's address in Florida. I wrote and a month later I received a letter from her daughter telling me that her mother had been moved to a nursing home in Cincinnati. She explained that in spite of physical problems, her mother's long-term memory seemed quite good. I telephoned the daughter and we agreed that I would send the story Mili wrote about Grace and some questions. The result was disappointing. At this distance, Grace could only remember that Mili was "brilliant and we skated a lot." This short, one-line theme would have many variations.

Nearly a year later a small gold-embossed green book, *Riley Farm-Rhymes*, arrived in the mail from Cincinnati. The daughter found it along with four snapshots of Mili when she was cleaning out her mother's house. Mili had dedicated it "To my chum, 'Gracious,' Christmas, 1918 from Mili." She underlined many passages in the book and on the last page penned a poem.

And this is the pledge that shall never grow old,
  and this is the Chum Song that silently sings
Through the now and the *then* and *what will be*—forever
  I love you, my chum, with a love that was never begun,
With a love that will silently live through—the always
  My love is the same through all space and a time,
For a love of a chum for a chum "endureth forever!"

—Mildred Fish (1918)

Mili began her literary apprenticeship on the school magazine and newspaper at West Division High. She competed for and often

won literary prizes: a story, "Mein Kamerad," about "Christian love in war time" won first prize—an eight-dollar camera—in a national Christmas contest sponsored by the *Ellsworth* (Kansas) *Messenger*. This sparked her first appreciative review: the *South Bend* (Indiana) *Interlude* wrote that " 'Mein Kamerad' is worth more than an eight dollar Kodak."[12] Mili had chosen a career in journalism. She knew that two promising Wisconsin women had gotten their start on newspapers. One was Edna Ferber, whose book, *Dawn O'Hara*, about a young girl who becomes a successful reporter in Milwaukee, appeared in 1911. Her characters were taken from the "Front Page" offices of the *Milwaukee Journal*. Ferber's role model was another young Wisconsin reporter, later a novelist and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Zona Gale.

An assassin's bullets fired in the obscure Bosnian city of Sarajevo ended Milwaukee's innocence. Within three years the powerful anti-Germanism of the World War I years would destroy its easy-going gemütlichkeit.

Many Germans had come to the shores of Lake Michigan because they did not wish to serve in the kaiser's army. Anarchists and Socialists did not believe in giving their lives for what they viewed as the kaiser's war. Although there were pro-German and pro-English camps, in Milwaukee the predominant sentiment was isolationist. Elected officials, including Milwaukee's Socialist mayor, Daniel Hoan, Socialist congressman, Victor Berger, and Progressive Republican senator, Robert M. La Follette, received strong support from those who wished to keep America out of the war.

The Senate Judiciary Committee investigating a connection between the brewing interests—heavy advertisers in the German-language newspapers—and German propaganda failed to find one, but nevertheless the Milwaukee German newspapers were censored. During the height of the war, the editors of the Socialist paper, the *Milwaukee Leader*, could neither send nor receive mail. In 1916, local Germans rallied to the cause of the fatherland, 175,000 attending a German relief meeting. But when, shortly after the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, the *Milwaukee Journal* declared that it wanted "no more German-American banks or Deutscher clubs" it got its way. The statue of

Germania was removed from the Brumder Newspaper Building; the *Germania* became the *Herold*; the German theater was no more; the Deutscher Klub became the Wisconsin Club. Men shaved their Kaiser Wilhelm mustaches. Sauerkraut, a staple on local menus, became "liberty cabbage" and jelly rolls called bismarcks became "American beauties." The movements of Germans were circumscribed—bridges over the river were off-limits, as were areas around factories that might be sabotaged. Yellow paint was spattered over the homes of German-Americans on the west side as the citizens of "America's pinkest city" soon tried to outdo each other in protestations of loyalty to the United States.

Mili would never forget the experience of living through the war. At first, in 1914, there was a directive stating that the war could "only be of interest as a school study insofar as pertinent geographical and commercial problems automatically enter the children's daily recitations." No teacher should "indulge or permit a child to indulge in a condemnatory attitude towards any nation."[13] However, in May 1915, when the Germans sank the *Lusitania*, claiming hundreds of American lives, attitudes changed. Bismarck's countrymen had hoped that Americans would side with them, but they had forgotten his 1880 admonition that the most important political fact was that the North American continent spoke English. Now, teaching the language of Goethe was prohibited. School auditoriums rang with patriotic songs. West Side High School boys made flagpoles and bulletin boards. West Side High School girls sewed flags, knitted socks, and rolled bandages. Mili became the *Comet*'s war correspondent and she wrote the poem that could be said to prefigure her own fate:

Our Boys!

They saw the need—and went; their life
    Narrowed in a sterner living,
Stripped of its tinsel, leaving the bare intent:
    To fight and love.
Perhaps a nobler life is theirs in death—
    How little of the debt can we repay!
Even our gratitude they need not now!
    'Tis not enough to give our thanks,
Thanks that they justified our high ideal.—

Oh, God, is ev'n the fullest measure of our lives
Enough to justify the sacrifice.

(*The Comet*, 1917)

Friendship, love, sacrifice, a noble life: at fifteen she had announced her themes. In later years, Mildred would regret her patriotic zeal.

During January 1918, there were warnings about pneumonia and flu, an epidemic that would sweep the world in the wake of the war. In the Midwest there was a blizzard. In Milwaukee, the heavy snowfall—twenty-one inches fell in thirty-six hours—was the worst recorded in twenty years. Coal went undelivered and garbage remained uncollected. Families went without their Monday milk and rolls. Shovels sold at a premium as residents became trench diggers, fighting their way through waist-high snow. Behind a five-foot drift in the barn, where he had been exiled by his wife, William Fish was found dead. He was alone, having sold the horses to pay bad debts. In his small office, the coachman's room, the iron stove had gone out, yet the gaslight was still burning.

It was a shock. Some years later, Mildred wrote a story, "The Death of Frank Burke," about it. She preferred to remember her father as "still tall and straight." There had been "a hint of his former overbearing and dramatic attitude in the way he held himself."[14] Mili called it "galloping consumption." His death certificate is more prosaic: "acute myocarditis," an inflammation of the heart. On Wednesday, January 9, a notice appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal* of the eight o'clock funeral services for William Cooke Fish, "aged 61 years, 10 months and 26 days." He was buried in Menomonee Falls "among his family."

In retrospect, the family thought they could get along better without him. Although his wife expressed regret that she had not been kinder to William, she was now free to move to Washington where there was a demand for workers in the expanding federal government. No one recalls hearing Mili speak about her father, and she never mentioned him in the scores of letters she wrote her mother.

Her strongest feelings were evoked by her parting from Grace. One July morning they met for the last time. Mili, dressed in a deep green cape and holding her straw poke bonnet with a match-

ing green ribbon, looked back at Grace standing at the corner, her face "stormed by pain and grief."[15] With tears in her own eyes, Mili strode toward the train that would take her to Washington.

The four snapshots Mili sent Grace the next year along with the book of Riley's poems show a tall, narrowly built girl with an elegant long neck, sharp nose, generous mouth, and luminous skin, the head posed with its customary tilt. Not yet the beauty she was to become, she appears eager, self-confident, smiling, and, in the one picture in which she displays her voluptuous blond hair—it cascades well below the waist of her middy blouse—quite flirtatious.

In Washington, Georgina went to work as a stenographer in the Veterans Administration. With Harriette and Marion married and Bob struggling to make a living on a rented farm near Madison, Georgina focused on Mildred, who now bore the brunt of her dreams and ambitions. Harriette's husband, Fred Esch, gave them the brown-wallpapered front bedroom in the two-story white frame house on Brookville Road in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He planted an elm tree to remind them of home. Mili now had two young nieces, Jane and Marion, to care for. In her senior year, she made new friends at Western High, in Georgetown, a long trip by streetcar.

Western High was the public school of choice for Washington society; many members of Congress and diplomats sent their children there. Western High emphasized not only a solid academic preparation for university but also the "great educational force" of the lunchroom—"spotless linen, bright silver, china of gracious shape, and beautiful decorations." One of the boys who shared Mili's table was next-door neighbor Francis Birch. He became her confidant and sometime beau. Birch remembered Mili as "a very agreeable person." She was "introspective and concerned with things" he told me, but "her interest in social issues made her fair game to people that wanted her to become involved with things."

Both worked on the *Western Breeze*, the school newspaper put out by Margaret Merrill's journalism class, and both were editors of the yearbook, the *Trailblazer*. Miss Merrill also coached the drama club. Mili appeared as Princess Angelica before a packed house in the 1919 senior class play, Thackeray's *The Rose and the*

Ring. She went out for sports, earning a place on the basketball and baseball teams. Her classmates chose her as their class poet. The entry next to her yearbook picture, written by her classmates, recaptures the sixteen-year-old Mili:

> Her writings have that touch of skill,
> Which will yet lead to fame;
> And in the drama speaking
> Her ability's the same.

Records are scant for the two years following her graduation. It seems she spent the first working, probably at the Veterans' Bureau, where "efficiency meant that the efficiency experts tried to make every one work like a machine."[16] During her last year in the capital, she attended George Washington University. She disliked it. The school was not "business-like" enough. She was homesick. She was a Wisconsin girl and the family tradition was to attend a Wisconsin university. So, in the fall of 1921, with her savings and money from her mother—far too much according to Harriette, who felt Georgina was exploited—Mili returned to Wisconsin.

FOUR

Nonconformist

Mildred at the University of Wisconsin, 1926

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Browsing through the papers of Louis Lochner, onetime graduate of Mildred's alma mater, Milwaukee's West Division High, and sometime Berlin bureau chief of the Associated Press (during the Third Reich), I came upon a multistanzed poem, "To and from the Guillotine," dedicated to Mildred Harnack. In 1947, the author, Clara Leiser, sent her verses to Lochner to enlist his help in establishing a Mildred Fish-Harnack Fund. "It is nearly incredible that this whole case has no attention here in America," Leiser wrote. Her finished poem would portray Mildred working in her death cell and recall the last lines of *Faust*: "das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinau." The eternal feminine guides us on.

Clara Leiser was the recipient of the "better not write . . . but don't forget me," postcard, Mildred wrote from London in 1939. In fact, as I was to learn, not only did Clara Leiser never forget Mildred, but over the years she had become the self-appointed custodian of the legend and some letters. Long ago, she promised Mildred to bear witness, if necessary, to the Harnacks' anti-Fascist deeds, in case someone would accuse them of "being Nazis."

"She was a Communist, you know," Leiser said over the telephone, as if to discourage me in my search. Her own attempts at establishing a memorial for Mildred had been sabotaged, she claimed, by "that evil fellow Wisconsinite," Joseph R. McCarthy. Mildred's sister Harriette held a responsible position in the Labor Department and she feared exposure. At her request, Leiser dropped everything in the "McCarthy days." Although it was her "sunny, golden friend" she wanted to have commemorated, she did agree with Mildred's sister that "we shouldn't sanctify Mildred." Furthermore, if I intended to write a biography, she wasn't altogether sure she wanted to help. However, she occasionally called to ask me questions and ultimately warmed to my project. Finally after several postponements, I climbed the four flights of stairs to the top of a lovely old brownstone on New York's St. Luke's Place to see Clara and the box containing the materials she had been collecting since 1945.

Clara's feelings toward Mildred were ambivalent; her anecdotes began nobly but veered midthought to reflect badly on their subject. "Oh yes, Mildred was good-looking, but she was pretty

earthy. She had terrible table manners," she once told me. She claimed to be Mildred's closest friend, and there were visits—four in Berlin, one in New York—between 1933 and 1939. In 1935 they attended a mass trial in Berlin. Subsequently, Clara encouraged her to leave but Mildred replied ominously: "Some of us feel we have to stay to keep an eye on developments."

The last time she saw Mildred was in Berlin in August 1939. Mildred gave her a coin purse in which Clara smuggled out a diamond for a refugee. Clara wrote, edited, or translated three books on Germany. In 1941, the Nazis banned them "for the protection of the people and the State."[1] *She spent her war years aiding refugees.*

We talked about the poem she had written in honor of Mildred. The verses came to her suddenly. Late on a summer night in 1945, she was walking home from the post office after mailing a letter to Mildred's sister describing her last visit with Mildred during the war.

"The beginning was insistent. It had to be set down. The verses just poured out," she recalled. Her teacher, William Ellery Leonard, once remarked to her that "whether you ever amount to something will depend on whether something ever moves you enough." "Of course," she said, "that's what happened when I heard about Mildred's death."

"Madison is my home as no other spot of earth," professor William Ellery Leonard wrote in his autobiography,

> I needed these quiet inland lakes and bluffs, these wooded shores, these long coulees and sunny oak-openings, and these west winds of Wisconsin. . . . Madison was to me the peculiar City, a Capitol dome on one hill, a University dome on the other, and each dome, as in no other city, mirrored in water, and her homes and factories and stores, as in no other city, girdled with neighboring fields of corn and neighboring woodlands of wild flowers.[2]

Madison in the 1920s was the quintessential American town. Indeed, it was a model for *Our Town*, the play by Thornton Wilder, whose father, Amos, was the owner and editor of the *Wis-*

consin State Journal, one of two local newspapers. Like Athens, with which local boosters equated it, Madison was a city on a hill. The "Hill" was the site of the University. The student who climbed to the top floor of Bascom Hall, the Parnassus of the literary muses, looked down beyond the weathered bronze statue of the Great Emancipator, over the green of the lower campus, past the hot dog wagons and popcorn stands lining State Street, and across to the white granite Capitol, the seat of one of the most progressive legislatures in the country.

Madison was small but not provincial. Residents, if they are old enough, proudly tell you that there used to be a conductor on the old Northwestern railway line who would shout as the train pulled into the station, "Madison, capital of the World." There was something in the air, some called it the "hum of culture." There were musicales, bridge clubs, drama clubs, a science club, and a club that met together once a week to read Homer after tea—in Greek. Snobbery was intellectual; society was otherwise egalitarian. One social arbiter, Gertrude Slaughter, the wife of the chairman of the Classics Department, wrote in her memoir, "Nowhere have I seen less respect for the almighty dollar. When our only rich heiress married a poor man with brains, it was considered eminently suitable; not so when a member of one of the honored old families married a rich man without any intellectual distinction."[3]

There were many famous visitors. One of them, Horace Greeley, remarked that "Madison has the most magnificent site of any inland town I ever saw."[4] This was so not because of any remarkable foresight or careful planning by the city fathers, but because the town meandered through a cluster of beautiful lakes named after Wisconsin's Indian tribes—Mendota, Wingra, Monona, and Waubesa.

Madison's wide streets separated broad lawns. University buildings and some Langdon Street mansions were of the tawny local sandstone; most of the private homes and rooming houses that nestled in cul de sacs lining the campus were white frame. Bordering the tree-lined bays of Lake Mendota, the campus was bucolic: cows still grazed on the front lawn of Agricultural Hall. Year-round picnics, autumn bonfires, winter ice boating, serenades on spring nights in Sorority Alley, sunbathing on the fraternity piers and the idle drifting of canoes in summer figured far more