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ART 400-01: Archival Research Project

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Archival Research Project

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Photo 1: Virginia Bedford in Studio, date unknown



Photo 2: Virginia Bedford in Classroom, 1971

Enameling is “the process of applying a thin coat of glass to a metal which, when heated to a high temperature, melts and becomes fused to the metal.”¹ Photo 1 depicts Virginia Bedford applying a thin coat of glass to a piece of metal in her studio. Enameling dates back to the ancient Greek times and the Celts and Vikings of the 7th century developed techniques and designs. It was popular in medieval times because of its rich color. The “Macedonian renaissance” in the 9th to 11th centuries developed the

¹ The Department of Art, *Virginia Bedford: her life and work at Longwood* (Farmville, VA: Longwood College, March 10, 1971), 1.

technique into cloisonné. There is an example in Pala D'oro in St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. In 1500, France created a new technique which used metal instead of glass in enameling.² Bedford began enameling at University of Tennessee in Gatlinburg Tennessee. It was once stated that, "Virginia Bedford's expert craftsmanship in the enameling medium is equaled by her taste and imagination and an ancient technique becomes modern and vital through her hands."³

Ceramics are the result of "subjecting earthen products to heat."⁴ The ideas of care and craftsmanship are needed to produce a piece in ceramics which would be considered art. The artist should understand the meticulous process and the limitations of the medium provides. Virginia Bedford was known for bringing knowledge and dexterity to the artform of ceramics. When you work with the aesthetic qualities within ceramics, it can turn ceramics into art.⁵ "Bedford's ceramics demonstrates clearly that old techniques, modern technology, craftsmanship and artistic talent can be successfully combined in an object that is practical on the one hand and on the other, a work of art."⁶ Photo 2 depicts Bedford holding a piece of ceramic artwork in a classroom in 1971.

Virginia E. Bedford majored in education at the University of Missouri in Columbia Missouri.⁷ In 1931, she attended Columbia's Teacher College in New York. She then received her Master of Arts in

² *Virginia Bedford: her life and work at Longwood*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Virginia Bedford: her life and work at Longwood*, 9.

⁵ *Virginia Bedford: her life and work at Longwood*, 9-10.

⁶ *Virginia Bedford: her life and work at Longwood*, 10.

⁷ Virginia Bedford, *Virginia State Teachers College Job Application* (Farmville, VA: June 27, 1928).

1932.⁸ Miss Bedford began her teaching career in Port Arthur Texas at the Junior High School Institution of Art in 1927 to 1928. She then took a position at the Junior High School Institution of Art in Akron Ohio in 1928. She then moved back to Missouri to teach at the Institute State Teachers College in Cape Girardeau in 1928.

On June 27, 1928, Virginia Bedford applied to become an “Instructor in Department of Drawing.”⁹ Miss Bedford left her position in Cape Girardeau Missouri for a “change in climate and improvement of salary and position.”¹⁰ She was 23 years old when she applied to her position. She was not married, and never ended up marrying.¹¹ When Virginia Bedford arrived at Longwood for the first time, the school was still known as the State Teachers College in Farmville Virginia.¹²

It has been recorded that, “Miss Bedford has taught such courses as design, figure-drawing, lettering, art education, ceramics, enamels, and general crafts.”¹³ Virginia Bedford became the chair for the art department at the State Teachers College in 1942.¹⁴ In 1968, Virginia Bedford was “promoted from associate professor to professor.”¹⁵ She retired from her position on July 1, 1972. After she stepped

⁸ Helen W. Mason, “In Distance Places: Sisters’ Lives Run Parallel,” *Farmville Herald*, March 26, 1971.

⁹ *Virginia State Teachers College Job Application*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “In Distance Places: Sisters’ Lives Run Parallel.”

¹³ *Virginia Bedford: her life and work at Longwood*, 1.

¹⁴ “In Distance Places: Sisters’ Lives Run Parallel.”

¹⁵ “Promotions at Longwood College,” *Farmville Herald*, March 8, 1968.

down as chair, Barbara Bishop became the chair of the art department at Longwood College.¹⁶ Virginia was a member of the Farmville Presbyterian Church and a council member of the National Art Association. She held the title of women's champion golfer in Farmville for some time. Miss Bedford has served as the President of the Art Section of the Virginia Education Association and served as President in the Farmville chapter of the American Association of University Women.¹⁷ She was a gardener and even had an in home to make her enamels.¹⁸

Art was clearly important to Virginia Bedford because she did devote her entire life to it. Art had a big impact on her life, and she wanted to share that with other people. Bedford taught, studied, and developed the field of art during her time at Longwood College. Bedford once gave a lecture titled "Visual Arts in a Changing Society" in November of 1972. The lecture was given to the local chapter of American Association of University Women. Bedford stated, "any thorough study of art calls for the examination of artist and his work from many points of view."¹⁹ A viewer must acknowledge historical situation, social conditions, and working methods. An artist can create mood, shock, happiness, tell a story, record history, and inspire the viewer. Bedford also discussed art throughout the centuries. In medieval art, the artists were inspired religion. Pop art is based on contemporary feelings and the ideas of a man's realistic way of life. Art reflects modern society just as music and literature does.²⁰ "Miss

¹⁶ "In Distance Places: Sisters' Lives Run Parallel."

¹⁷ "Honor Is Planned for Miss Bedford," *News Leader*, 1970.

¹⁸ "In Distance Places: Sisters' Lives Run Parallel."

¹⁹ "Study of Art Calls for Insight Of Artist From Many Viewpoints," *Farmville Herald*, November 10, 1967.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Bedford illustrated her talk with slides showing changes which have taken place over the centuries in the manner in which man expresses himself as an artist.”²¹

Virginia Bedford made a legacy for herself when she became chairman in 1942. While chairman, Bedford expanded the staff, courses offered, some majors, and increased the number of students who committed their careers to art.²² Miss Bedford was an inspiration to students and faculty. It was once stated that, “under Miss Bedford’s leadership the Longwood art faculty and teaching facilities have been progressively expanded. The department’s growth and prominence on the campus is currently reflected in the fact that there is now under construction a handsome new fine arts complex consisting of two buildings side-by-side.”²³ Bedford was once a recipient of a Carnegie scholarship.²⁴ In 1970, the new fine arts building opened at Longwood College. The building was designed by Ben R. Johns, Jr. from Richmond. The cost of the building was \$1,285,000. It was planned that the building be named in honor of Miss Virginia E. Bedford.²⁵ Henry I. Willet, Jr., who was once a President of Longwood once said, “I think it most fitting that our Board of Visitors would wish to recognize in this way the singular contributions Miss Bedford has made to Longwood over the years as an effective teacher, an able administrator, and a member of the faculty, who served the college with distinction in numerous capacity beyond her classroom and department.”²⁶

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Art Department Expanding; Dedicated to Miss Bedford,” *Rotunda*, March 11, 1970.

²³ F. Edward Thomas Jr., *Special News Release to the Virginia Art Education Association* (Farmville, VA: Longwood College, January 1970).

²⁴ *Virginia Bedford: her life and work at Longwood*, 1.

²⁵ “Art Department Expanding; Dedicated to Miss Bedford.”

²⁶ Ibid.

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*There are no secondary sources listed here. We discussed that the way we have approached this paper does not require any secondary sources. *