Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emerita Joan Hazel Carter

JOAN HAZEL CARTER, Professor Emerita of African Languages and Literature, died peacefully surrounded by family on August 3, 2016, in Bradenton, Florida, at the age of 88. Hazel, as she preferred to be called, was born on February 22, 1928, to Charles and Constance Wilkinson in Cambridge, England. At the conclusion of her secondary education in 1947 she received a scholarship to study French in Paris for a period of several months. Subsequently, fortunate to receive a highly prestigious “State Scholarship,” she was able to pursue a degree in English from 1947-1950 at St. Hugh’s College at Oxford University.

Hazel’s parents had instilled within her a love for the poetry and cultural traditions of England and Scotland. From an early age she memorized hundreds of verses, holding them in her memory throughout her adult life and right up until her passing. One week after the beginning of the Blitz bombings of London in September 1940 which continued through May 1941, Hazel’s parents sent Hazel and her brother Nigel to stay with relatives where they would be out of harm’s way. It was there that Hazel won a prize for her mastery of the poetry of Robert Burns, an academic achievement of which she was proud for the remainder of her life and which further motivated her to pursue an academic career despite the many obstacles facing women in academia at that time.

Hazel’s study of French, as well as her experience living in Scotland and being exposed to another variety of English, sparked within her an interest in spoken language, and most particularly the “sounds” of human language. Soon after earning her degree in English, she learned of full scholarships to study an African language in a MA degree program being offered by School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. She promptly applied and was one of four to be named a Scarborough Postgraduate scholar at SOAS. She spent two years in London studying Shona under the expert guidance of her tutor Herbert Chitepo, who subsequently became the first African in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to be named a barrister and who, from outside the country, later came to play an important role in the African liberation struggle prior to his assassination. In 1952, through the funding provided by her scholarship, Hazel left for Southern Rhodesia to conduct her fieldwork on the Shona language for a little over one year. She completed her MA thesis in 1954, at which time she was appointed a Lecturer in Bantu Languages. From 1957 through 1960 Hazel left SOAS to relocate to Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), where she came to conduct research on Tonga at the request of the (British) Social Science Research Council and came to pass the Lower and Higher Levels of Civil Service Exams in both Tonga and Nyanja, which led to her appointment as the Local Examiner for the Civil Service in both languages. She rejoined SOAS as a lecturer upon her return to England in 1960 and taught courses in Shona and Tonga through materials she prepared. In the 1960s she began research into Kongo, and in 1971 she earned her PhD from SOAS upon completing her dissertation entitled, Syntactic Tone Phrases in Kongo, under the direction of the famed Bantu scholar Malcolm Guthrie. In this path-breaking study Hazel conclusively demonstrated that the tonal system in the Angolan dialect of Kongo was syntactic in nature. In the same year Hazel was promoted to the position of “Reader,” a faculty rank in the British system roughly equivalent to the rank of “full professor” in American universities. In this position in 1972 Hazel came to head the Bantu languages section, and upon her retirement from SOAS in 1983 she obtained emerita status.

In recognition of her contributions to Bantu studies and African linguistics, the Department of African Languages & Literature here at UW-Madison appointed her a visiting professor during the 1980-1981 academic year. Finding the intellectual life at UW-Madison much to her liking, Hazel chose to retire from SOAS at an early age and relocate permanently to Madison. After three short-term appointments, she was appointed a full professor with tenure in our department in 1986 and for three years (1991-1994) served as department chair. Shortly after her retirement from UW-Madison in June 1995, she was appointed (continued)
Professor Emerita. She made a great intellectual contribution to the life of our department for which she will always be fondly remembered.

Hazel’s research and publications primarily focused on the phonology, tonology, and syntax of Central African languages. In 1958 she published a translation of her former tutor’s famous epic poem, that is Herbert Chitepo’s “A Tale Without a Head,” which in its original Shona version inspired those fighting for African self-rule. In view of the need for pedagogical materials for the teaching of Shona and Kongo in particular, she published course books and readers in a pioneering effort in this area. Owing to her reputation as a leading scholar of Shona, for a number of years she held the position of examiner for Shona for the International Baccalaureate. Several years prior to coming to UW-Madison she became interested in the traces of African languages in the Americas and in fact spent several months in Jamaica doing research in this area in 1985. Related to this interest, she developed a new course at UW-Madison entitled, “African Languages in the New World.” Over her illustrious career she published no fewer than eleven books and 31 articles in either academic journals or edited volumes, nine of which focus on the relations of African languages to the Americas.

Hazel took a great interest in the intellectual development of her students and was known to be a caring mentor for those graduate students who studied under her. Though Hazel’s professional career revolved around theoretical linguistics, her love for English and Anglo-Saxon literature was a part of her persona all throughout her life. Her breadth of knowledge of English vocabulary was phenomenal, and it would have been hard to find anyone who could beat her at Boggle, her favorite word game. As another hobby, Hazel took great interest in spinning wool, lacemaking, and several needle-crafts. She was a member of the British Lace Guild and later of the Madison Knitters’ Guild. She published a book on lace entitled, Shetland Lace Knitting from Charts, and the skill she exhibited in designing intricate lace patterns won several awards at fairs in Wisconsin. In demand as an expert, she taught classes and workshops in spinning, knitting, and lace-making throughout the Midwest. True to her Scottish heritage and her love for Robert Burns, she joined the St. Andrew’s Society of Madison and served a term as its president. Each January during her years at Madison, she would often invite friends to her home to celebrate the birthday of Burns with poetry recitations, treating her guests with a sumptuous meal replete with the traditional Scottish “haggis.”

A Mass of Christian Burial was held on August 22, 2016, at Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Madison, immediately followed by a committal service at Roselawn Memorial Park in Monona. Her brother Nigel Wilkinson preceded her in death. Hazel is survived by her younger brother, Colin Wilkinson, her son Guy Carter, and her daughter Hilary Walker as well as her grandson Ross Walker.

Memorial Resolution Committee
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