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FOXFIRE



Mary Crovatt Hambridge



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MARY HAMBIDGE

By Eliot Wigginton

Mary Crovatt Hambidge has died. The date is not important for she was not a woman bound by dates. Most never knew her age. It would have been easy to find it out, but in reference to her, all those earthly tags seemed somehow unimportant. It was as if she had always been here and always would be, despite the outward signs of decay - signs which only somehow added to the feeling of permanence that surrounded her.

The conviction (that flew in the face of logic) that she would always exist in just such a fashion is the cause of our shock when we find that she is gone. It is almost as if Stonehenge had slipped into the earth. It is impossible to think of her in the past tense. She is, despite the fact that now she is not.

She would have much liked the feeling that she had created that aura of permanence, for if anything, she believed she was not a temporary presence but a reincarnated spokesman for a philosophy that stretched as far back into time as Sappho and as far ahead as man would last. She was not of the age of Classical Greece, or the age of Thoreau or Emerson, or the age of Technology; but was simply one more in a long line of refined sensitivities that have always existed to remind us that we common folk have a long way to go if we're ever to be anything but common. As such, she made us sometimes uncomfortable.

But some of us, uncomfortable though we were, wanted to be like her - to follow her - to accept the challenges she flung at us. But we never had the nerve to throw ourselves off the earth and into the space around her. She was a Jonathan Livingston Seagull, and we were afraid. Those of us, that is, who would follow. Most others simply ignored her. Few here will mourn the fact that she is gone. They will only marvel at the fact that she finally left at all.

Mary Hambidge would probably not be a subject for this magazine were it not for the fact that in a very real sense she played a larger role than she ever imagined in its birth. That, plus the fact that at one time or another, nearly every mountain native on Betty's Creek worked for her in some capacity, and so she directly influenced the lives of a number of our contacts - people like Margaret and Richard Norton, Dean Beasley, Claude and Edith Darnell, Dan Manous - all names that will be familiar to our readers.

But she was not of the mountains herself, neither by birth nor temperament nor philosophy. She was born, rather, into the aristocracy of Brunswick. Her father, Judge Alfred J. Crovatt, was a lawyer who helped found the Jekyll Island Club, a club so exclusive that most of its members were millionaires. Mary was a red-headed rebel who, after being educated in the East, ran away to New York to become an actress, a model, and something of a disgrace to her family.

As she told the story, she lived for years on the verge of extinction until she met and married Jay Hambidge, an illustrator of genuine talent. It was not to be long before he made a design discovery that rocked the artistic world: a set of principles he grouped under the name "Dynamic Symmetry" (referring to the symmetry and proportion of things that grow in Nature as opposed to the static symmetry of, say, a snowflake). It was a monumental discovery in its time for it provided the lost key to much of Classical Greek design, and it catapulted Jay Hambidge into instant fame. Artists like George Bellows, Robert Giles, William Sergeant Kendall and Robert Henri came to study with him, learning how to proportion and arrange the elements on their own canvases according to its principles. Tiffany's designed a whole line of their jewelry, and the Chrysler Corporation designed several of their cars using his discovery. Consider, for example, this title trumpeted over a full-page ad that appeared in the January 19, 1924 issue of the Saturday Evening Post: "Dynamic Symmetry - the Basis of Beauty in the Chrysler."

Much of Jay Hambidge's time in checking his hypotheses was spent in Greece (1920-1921) measuring and sketching temples, vases and statues, and proving again and again that the proportions and ratios evident in the design of those things were identical to the ratios that govern all growth in Nature (through the Fibonacci Series, for example).

His wife, meanwhile, found herself at the foot of the Acropolis learning how to card, spin and weave in a simple school run by peasant women. Though she had no way of knowing it at the time, those hours she spent there were to provide most of the thrust of her second life which began shortly after Jay Hambidge died.

After his death in New York in 1924, she moved to a friend's summer home on the side of Black Rock Mountain in Rabun County. There she carried on with the task of getting her husband's work into book form. The first book, a collection of lessons from his magazine, The Diagonal, was entitled Elements of Dynamic Symmetry and was published by Yale University Press (it has now been reissued by Dover). Simultaneously, she was nursing the idea for a weaving school of her own which would be much like that she had left in Greece. That dream came true when a friend bought (for \$6,000.00) and presented to her nearly 800 acres of mountain land on Betty's Creek - later to become The Jay Hambidge Art Foundation, Inc.

There, with her "peasants", she began to weave again. But what weaving! Whereas for the mountain women she employed, weaving was a practical, utilitarian skill, for Mary Hambidge it was a spiritual expression: "When you're weaving, it's the most fascinating thing. You yourself go right into those threads, into that rhythm, into the whole thing. It just emanates from you. You become part of it. You're related to it. You put on those threads, and then you see this beautiful piece of material unfolding. And then if you weave designs in it, that's the most thrilling thing - to see those designs come in almost as if you were painting them, you know. All the beauty and perfection is in the raw material. You draw it out and are one with it."

The designs she provided (based, of course, on Dynamic Symmetry), and the colors she created (colors that so closely matched those of

Nature that people came away awed - she died with the secret of those colors), the mountain women executed and the work was on. A shop was opened on Madison Avenue in New York and soon received orders from the likes of Greta Garbo and Edward G. Robinson. Harry Truman had his yacht, "The Williamsburg," upholstered with her fabrics, and Jackie Gleason had his home done in her materials. The work won a Gold Medal at the Paris Exposition of 1937. The Smithsonian featured a spectacular display of her work.

And disciples began the trek down the muddy Betty's Creek Road in Rabun County.

What the disciples found when they got here was a tiny woman full of vibrant energy who was more alive than anyone they had ever met. She was a spring of fresh water from whom bubbled forth a constant, childlike amazement at:

- the brilliance of a fall leaf lying on the ground (she always picked them up and carried them home in her basket to put in letters to friends)

- the glorious richness of butterfly weed in full bloom (her favorite)

- the perfect contrast of red clay against blue/green mountains (she incorporated it all into her art)

- the beauty that could be created from the wool off a sheep's back (never touched by machine), or the clay from a creek

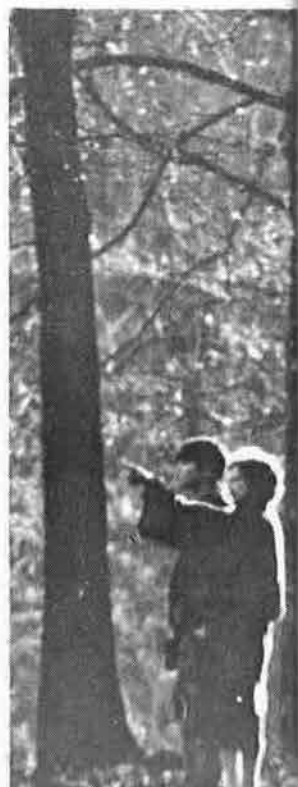
- the satisfaction of the taste of mint tea brewed in her tiny, skylit kitchen and served with Greek honey in the stoneware pottery of her good friend Julianna Busbee's Jugtown Ware.

"Life is sacred to me. To me, the idea that a Divine Principle governs the growth - my growth and your growth and Philo's [her dog] growth - is a sacred thought. That makes you a part of Nature. You're one with all these Divine Laws. All of these other laws of money and position are man-made. They're not God-made. Don't you agree with me?"

And they found a woman filled with a dream that went far beyond weaving itself. For here, she meant to have a community - a self-sufficient sanctuary for certain select individuals "who need a place like this to grow and develop; whose ideals are more powerful than the urge for riches; whose powers of creation need enhancement and nourishment." Her plan was for a place where someone could come, build a studio/home and have it for life. If he decided to leave, or if he died, the studio would revert back to the Foundation to be used by another, thus keeping the property intact while adding new facilities as well. It would be a Foundation owned by a Board of Directors who would live there permanently. And it would be based on work (farming, building, raising livestock and sheep), study (there would be classes in Greek and Dynamic Symmetry), and creation (individuals writing, composing, weaving, throwing pots, woodworking). The little income needed would come from the sale of crafts and from rental of studios to transient artists; food and shelter would come from the land; and cultural enrichment would come from those living there, as well as guest lecturers, performers, even exchange students from Greece. It would be a community immune to pressures from the outside - a self-contained, working unit bound by a realization of its oneness with Nature and natural law.



On a walk through fall woods with one of my students, Mike Letson, Mary Hambidge was, as always, filled with awe at colors, shapes and shadows.



And they saw she meant what she said, for she already had the land, a weaving shed, weavers, sheep to provide the wool, silk worms to provide silk, several studios, a guest house, farm land under cultivation, a grist mill, a lumber curing kiln, a barn, cattle, two mules - even a natural, bowl-shaped depression in the land set aside for an amphitheatre where plans for Greek plays were already underway. She even refused to buy clothes, wearing only dresses, stockings and stoles, she wove herself. She wasn't kidding.

"You've got to have places where people can learn the higher things of life - the simple ways of life such as we live here. The simple things that stand for taste and culture. They're really very simple.

"But these other things that people want - they want magnificent buildings and they want rich clothes and they want all the things that money gives. You've got to have the things that culture gives because what's the good of money if you don't know how to use it? The other comes first.

"Money is a materialistic ambition - it isn't idealistic. To make something beautiful is idealistic. To make a beautiful statue or to write a great book - to do the creative things, or the things you see within yourself. Don't you have these visions? Don't you see them? That's the point of it. It's a different thing. It isn't connected with the outside world. It's within you. Know thyself. And when you know yourself, you want to realize yourself. That's the reason I want to have classes here where we'll be cultivating our minds and our higher selves along with the work. You could go out and work in the fields and then come back and have a lesson in Greek. I think that was the secret of Greek culture. That they kept their touch with Nature and the soil and all the simple things of life...It keeps you real."

And they found a woman filled with a childlike faith - almost an ignorance or a blind spot some would call it impatiently - that that dream would eventually work. She wasn't sure how exactly, but it seemed natural and right and just that that be so, and with the right people... "Often we do things not realizing why we do them. They just seem instinctively right at the time. Then, later, we see how appropriate a response that was, and how the project fits into the scheme of things. It was a response to a natural, instinctive urge, and thus its rightness, though not realized at the time, becomes obvious later. [She was often to say this of Foxfire.] It's much like a seed. When it's just sprouting and growing, it doesn't understand why. It just obeys an urge, a law, when all conditions are 'go.' Later, it looks back on what it has become and sees why and for what reason and to what end."

Much she did not understand, and so she trusted - too completely, many would say, for she opened herself wide to those who would cheat her. Water lines and reservoirs ("It's a sort of a pump thing") and fireplaces and mill wheels and the legal gyrations involved in running a corporation baffled her, and caused her to throw up her hands in dismay: "I'm so ignorant about all these things I just do whatever they say!"

The same - almost an innocence - extended to people. Everyone was welcome, and thus many came. And used her. People were allowed to stay and eat that never should have been let in the drive.

But, as always, she trusted. Her philosophy that the isolation of the mountains themselves was her real protection and would eventually drive those away who didn't really belong actually seemed to work. It was uncanny. "I just let things come more or less as they would. I didn't know enough about it to just go ahead and do everything. I was just a child of destiny. I just had to let things - some went well and some didn't."

Some went very well indeed. The shop in New York, though it never once turned a monthly profit, became a gathering place for artists and musicians, just as the Foundation did. A friend promised the Foundation a small monthly income that would remain in effect until Mrs. Hambidge died, and that promise was not broken. It kept her from ever having to stoop to beg. Though she could pay them almost nothing (twenty-five cents an hour was about average), mountain people did pitch in in large numbers to provide skills in farming, building and maintenance.

As time passed, however, other things, in fact, did not go well with that dream. With increasing speed, this country changed and caught her in the middle right when it seemed she just might pull it all off. Soon she was treading water, then swimming just to hold her own, and then slowly but inexorably being pulled backwards. She never figured out exactly why, or how to change that, and she never gave up the dream; but the events that followed World War II turned her from an incurable optimist and chosen Child of Destiny into a woman who railed eloquently and elegantly against those forces she felt were pulling her back from her goal. Minimum wage laws closed the shop in New York. The books on Dynamic Symmetry began to lose money, and Yale let them go out of print. Factories came in, offered better wages, and lured many mountain people away from her. The Rabun Gap School's craft shop, in her opinion, "stole" her best weaver causing her to dislike the school from that time on. The county, despite her protestations (which she carried all the way to Washington) reworked and paved Betty's Creek Road, and drove the new highway right through her natural amphitheatre. Most recently, her land was taxed. Old friends who had pulled her out of scrapes before drifted away or died.

Had all these things come at once, they might have defeated her. As it was, they came like a Chinese water torture, one drop at a time, slowly altering the quality of her enthusiasm and optimism, and honing the quality of her outrage: "We've just got to get some Ladies and Gentlemen running this country!"

An hours-long tape recording I made of her one night in 1969 (from which most of the above quotations were taken) made it obvious where she lay part of the blame: "It was different when I first came here. I knew what I wanted and I went right after it. But then there was a change, you see. The factories moved in. Well, the minute that these people here [saw the big wages they paid], they couldn't resist it. They can't resist money. The common mind can't resist money. It's only the uncommon mind that sees other things greater than money. They see getting everything through money. It's a curious thing. I don't understand it myself because I was never that way. I wasn't born in that element. I don't mean that I scorned it. I've seen that you have to have it to be honorable and decent. You've got to work for it or live on charity. And that's what I want to do is work for my living and

work for the things I believe in.

"But [the common mind] can't resist that feeling of power it gives them - or popularity, or whatever. Nothing that you can buy is really worth it except certain material things that you have to have. It's queer. The whole thing is.

"When I first came here, [the mountain people, essentially self-sufficient then] were wonderful. But the minute the outside world comes in, they're ruined. I tried my best to keep them from being ruined. I tried so hard to do it. That's why I treated them not just as servants or anything like that. We were all just working together, you know. And we were just as happy. It was wonderful here for the first ten or fifteen years. But after the factories came in, they couldn't resist. The ones that wanted the money fell for the school and the factories and all of that, you know.

"I wonder if they're happy. I just don't know.

"A lot of people have worked for me here. But I don't know. I never make any great to-do when they stop. I had a few loyal people, but, my dear, it's pretty hard to work against the masses who are crazy about money.

"[One of my Greek friends left me for a big job in Atlanta.] She's like all the Greeks. All the Greeks must make money. It's a peculiar thing, but it's the one thing they haven't had, you see. The Greeks have been awfully poor, but Oh, Lord, they say Greece has changed completely. They're tearing down all the old houses and building up all these new things. That's going on everywhere. And America has done that. I'm so glad that I was in Greece before that happened. You know, this thing can happen in a short time and just can sweep the world. That's what it's done. New York has changed. And I just don't want that to happen to us. I think we want to keep one spot pure. I feel there's something here and we don't need that. We don't need all of this money, do we? I want security and a way to pay bills, but not a lot of money. Listen, if everything went to pieces, we could make our living here - grow our own vegetables, grow our own things. We have everything we need here. And if we have a small income coming in, we can take care of all of us.

"You cannot worship money and keep your soul."

The disciples who came believed that as strongly as she did in some cases. They heard the sounds of battle, they smelled the smoke; they knew the land had all the potential she claimed it had. And they usually shared her impatience with the worship of technology (when men first went to the moon, she had cried, "I don't think it's half as fantastic as they think it is. I don't know why they're so crazy. The moon has turned out to be just a dead planet. They're making a great to do over it on purpose because they want the excitement. They're stirring it up. They can't get excited about anything creative. You can't live on that. How can they live on that? I don't think it's such a remarkable thing. It's a mechanical conquest. That's what it is.")

And they shared her love of Nature and simplicity. Few could resist, for example, her declaration: "I think [Dynamic Symmetry] is the greatest discovery of this age. That's the way I feel about it. I think it relates you to all life. How on earth could there be a world without a law of symmetry and order? We grow by it. All the

plants - they wouldn't know how to grow without something inside of them moving them. I think it proves a God more than anything else. I think that God is in Nature. And I think that is what religion has gotten us away from. Nature has powers that are God-like. Are God powers. God rules all of Nature. And Nature should rule all of man and then man would be closer to God."

And they responded to her cry for help and came there to live - and help. My father, for example, who was attracted to the Foundation, wrote several books there, honeymooned there, and was taking me there when I was too young to remember most of what was happening. But I remembered enough. As a high school senior at the Hill School, I spent a whole year doing an independent study of Dynamic Symmetry that culminated when I graduated in a 260 page thesis on the subject complete with diagrams and photographs. She was radiant, asked me to spend a summer there, and I did. A seven-year barrage of letters followed me through college, and finally convinced me to return to Rabun County to teach school in Rabun Gap and work with her at the Foundation. I did that, finished one of the studios she had started, moved in and lived there for six years. Foxfire was born on her kitchen table, issue after issue came out of the little studio of mine; and when The Foxfire Book was published, I called her in the acknowledgements the "most remarkable woman I have ever met." I meant it.

That's not to say we never had our disagreements. Foxfire grew, consumed more and more of my time, and continued to spotlight mountain people - a breed she had never really loved as a whole and never really felt deserved that much credit or attention. I disagreed. Students I was working with took more and more of my energy, and she had never really enjoyed high school students. I felt differently. And the school itself took time - a school she had never felt was worth my devotion being filled with "ignorant people". And I disagreed again. So, slowly we drifted apart - I to my own piece of land and my own home, she to different disciples and new friends.

In the end, the dream was never realized. At the very last, she was still waiting: "I'm sort of letting things work themselves out. I'm not quite sure what will happen next, but the plans [of destiny] are all there. It's all there, just like those trees are there. It's coming of itself, you know." It never came.

The reasons for that are extraordinarily complex. They go far deeper than emotional shifts in our society; far deeper than obstacles like taxes and wage increases and the competition of factories. All these things played a part, but there was more, and there may be a lesson here for non-profit corporations everywhere:

Part of the fault lay in Mary Hambidge herself. The Foundation was always hers alone, despite everything she said to the contrary. Her dream would materialize in its own time and in her own way and by her hand alone. Disciples came prepared to teach, and there were no students. They came prepared to perform, and there was no audience. They came prepared to accept the challenge to get this program off the ground, or start that program tomorrow, and the programs never materialized. "It isn't the right time. Something else has to be settled first. Be patient. These things will come when they will come. The right people aren't here yet. It will

take money, which will come, but we don't have it now. Nothing must be forced."

The train was stalled in visions and revisions and indecisions, and finally the reservoirs of trust and patience her disciples had one by one ran dry. She was a Jonathan Livingston Seagull who flew herself, but unlike him could never, somehow, keep her followers airborne.

And part of the fault lay in the disciples themselves, who came to her, their artistic temperaments and jealousies aflame - with all the problems that brings; or who came to her willing to pitch in part time, but never quite willing to give up the security of a salary, or a home they could sell or pass on to a son or daughter, or a pension they would need in their old age.

And part of it may have rested in the nature of man himself. I have a suspicion, as yet unproved, that our destiny may be not so much to adopt intact someone else's dream, but to find and give birth to our own. Often the dreams we brought to share with her and add to hers, or the alterations in hers we asked permission to make, were irreconcilable with a grander vision that was beyond us. Greek tragedies reenacted in a cow pasture on Betty's Creek...?

To the end, she waited for the magic chemistry that would make the vision whole, but the alchemist never arrived. To the end, she waited to pass the reins into hands that would fight for her dream, but the reins never reached those hands.

And to the end, she picked up brilliant fall leaves and mailed them to all her friends.

Our correspondence spanned seven years - the last of my high school years and all of the five years of college - and filled several hundred pages. At one point, she urged me to leave Cornell and come to Georgia to work. I came, instead, after graduation; but at one point, whether I would stay in college or answer her call was very much a toss-up.

A few excerpts from a few of her letters follow. The passages may have as much (or more) relevance for some young people today as they did for me then.

11/28/60

All here never forget you and are always interested in all you do. Remember you were just a small child the first time you came! I always remember your playing in the little creek near the Carver Cabin!

...Some modern art is good, some bad, just as some abstract art is good, some bad. Always there is the question of taste and discrimination. Unfortunately, modern Americans go to extremes in everything and take up one fad after another - fads that have

no relation to natural law. They do not follow the Golden Mean of the classic Greeks, the "nothing in excess." It is my belief that this is the result of over-mechanization and mass production which is gradually destroying individual genius. Many of the criticisms of Dynamic Symmetry were that it was a formula, which is exactly the opposite of the truth. It develops individual genius, does not destroy it. However, it must be mastered and really understood. Man today is following a mechanical, not a creative, law. To understand this thoroughly, I find it most essential to study more the Greek point of view. Nature cannot be copied, it must be revealed.

9/2/61

...One thing Dynamic Symmetry does is to instill a love for perfection in all one does. I get terribly irritated by the frightful laissez faire attitude to work that this vile mechanistic thinking has done to our people, especially the mass of working people. We must establish a school governed by a principal of perfection which creates a love for any work one does, no matter how humble. I remember how I made myself even enjoy washing dishes! No work is a drudgery when one is inspired by a desire to do it as well as one can. Of course, degrees of perfection are governed by the type of the work.

1/5/63

...Do try not to hurry too much. It is so exhausting. When I find myself doing that, which all Americans do, I stop a moment, take several deep breaths and commune with myself, then I go on. It works very well. Try it. One more thing, I can't remember whether I sent you a sample of the silk I made the ties from. It was good pure silk, but I didn't care for the mixture so I changed it with dye. It's fun to do that - to see just how one can change something - and you know how I dislike waste!

1/18/63

...Regarding politics, a close friend of our new Governor was out here last week and wants to bring the Governor and his Lady out here to see us! I can't resist getting him to try to stop the desecration of our highway right in front of Betty's Creek. The sense that Americans lack more than any other is a sense of beauty. They love ugliness, vulgarity, distortion and they must be awakened to that fact or they won't survive. I shall fight it as long as I have breath left!

2/28/63

I was very happy to hear all your good news but especially about your not working at the hotel. I think you have had enough of that discipline for the present. When one needs it no more, it should slough off like the dead leaves on a plant...I believe in people having a certain discipline, but overdoing is harmful. I know a great deal about this personally! There are several sides to consider: the emotional, physical as well as the mental. We all need a certain amount of work we don't like to do as it builds character, but people who have certain born gifts should develop these because they are rare...That is why I do not agree in equality,

if understood in the right way. Equality means the "same." We are not all the same! For which thank God!

...Oh, I am forgetting our addition to the family - a black puppy with white feet, tail tip and collar. He appeared half-starved and very tired one day and of course, we had to feed him and take him in. He has a box on my porch to sleep in and won't leave the hillside or me. He's very sweet but wants to chew up everything in sight, especially me, which isn't so sweet! I really am very fond of him, alas.

3/12/63

I was much interested in all you wrote me about the students and their not knowing what they would do when they left College. They have no goal, they have not found themselves. All this is partly due to mechanized thinking and the philosophy of "equality" that everyone is the same. I believe just the opposite, that everyone is different in some way, and to find this particular difference, this which is the true self, is what each person must search for. To take each thing that comes, give it one's best, no matter how humble, is the most complete and whole way. One has to start with beginnings, the good earth. It is wrong to state that it will come in a flash of light if one has made no effort. If one is bored with everything one does and it does not come alive through his mind, how can he himself have any sort of revelation? Another thing, when the flash comes one sees only what he is ready to see! The more he is prepared, the greater will be the power of the light when it comes. I have given much thought to this. It would make a good subject for discussion!

All artists, poets, etc. have found that it is the realization of the oneness with nature that brings the great awakening. You see, we have gotten so far away from it with our mechanistic thinking. Oh, I have seen it all so clearly but few will listen and fewer act when they do! The greed for money, power, the materialistic urge, is too strong and they will wake up too late.

What you told me about that friend of yours who was so depressed because he did not know what he was going to do after graduation interested me. Why should he know? All people don't. But he can go on seeking, trying to learn, then - perhaps gradually he will find what he is to do. If any one had told me when I left school, that some day I would become a weaver, I would have thought him quite mad! I had never heard of such a thing as weaving. That's another thing, it's discouraging to make people think that things must come in miraculous ways - they come by hard work, even when one has a natural talent for them. Miracles are happening all the time in Nature but we take them for granted. All these marvelous effects produced by television, radio, etc. have really made young people lose faith in themselves - all the tales of wealth, adventure, etc. have given them an exaggerated idea of life. One little glimpse of real love, beauty, truth, wisdom would make these seem a mirage.

Anyway, what you said gave me an idea. That is for the young man you mentioned and, perhaps another in a similar state of mind, to spend a summer here helping to make this a beautiful spot as a retreat for artists, etc. trimming trees, working in the good earth, making rock gardens etc. etc. For this they would receive lessons

in dynamic symmetry, or carding, spinning, butter-making or whatever took their fancy. But they would be close to the good earth, to simple values and people and they would be giving something for love. They would not receive money - that would spoil it. I notice that they are organizing Peace Corps for young people to go to Europe to help there, but it never occurs to them to do something to help in this country. I am desperate for such help here and this would further the values we need in this country. Today everything must be paid for in money. It is a horrible influence for young people. I started this with the idea of the apprentice system, but could not practice it among these people because they were too poverty stricken.

The time has come now when the educated people, so called, must go back to the soil to regain its benefits. The people who have had it want to get away from it, they are tired and don't want to work. For me, work is the key-note. The big has been so emphasized, the little has been neglected, and yet life itself begins with a tiny seed. What a paradox!

4/28/63

The keynote here is work, work together, not just be patronized by a rich person. My plan for this is different and has to be, as I am not rich and don't believe in the thing just supported, but built up through work and human endeavour. I want to have separate studies here, but I divide the people who come into two classes, Permanents and Transients. The Permanents live here, have their own homes and are free to do their own work, but also have some responsibility towards the Foundation. The Transients come for various periods, occupy their own Studios and pay in some way that they can. One has to pay at the McDowell but not at the Huntington Hartford. However, I think that last tends towards an attitude of accepting too passively and having no sense of responsibility or of gratitude towards the organization. I am very anxious to have this place built up on certain principles, not just on donations of money. My idea, perhaps, is something on the order of cooperation but I dislike the word, as it's too Latin! The Greek word symbiosis is better, Life together, not just work. It might be a good idea for me to visit both Macdowell and Yaddo some day. I wish you could go too. You see, I want classes held here, and a definite plan for study to inspire the people who come. I missed that at the Hartford. I got them started having discussions and showing their work in the evenings, when I was at the H. H. This idea of work together is in the socialistic direction but then I have some of that in me - only my definition of it is that the only real democrat is the true aristocrat! Both these words are from the Greek!

Well, we are trying an experiment this Summer and will learn from it. There is much being stirred up about the educational institutions and education itself in America now. Colleges etc. are run like Factories and the culture of the mind is nothing. As a result we are producing just a bunch of human machines - can that be right? You have enough originality to break away, but how many have? Most of the young people don't know how to think and cannot distinguish between good and bad or right and wrong. Surely education should give us some idea of that!

What I want is a group with a common ideal to work together for. I use the word in its sense of having an idea in common, not one that is held by the general mob.

What they need is right leadership and the intelligence developed as to what is right. You see, when I came here what I was attempting to do was to awaken these people as to what they already had and to develop it to a higher plane. But ignorance is so blind it has little power of selection, so it usually selects what is not the best for them, rather than the contrary.

5/4/63

It is now up to us to prove that we are not just dreamers! It seems to me that I have done this and yet people still doubt! I understand that too. Most people are too steeped in material things to see clearly the meaning of inner law. They judge by immediate results, not by ultimate development. If I suddenly made a big fortune they would at once believe in what I was doing! But that to me would indicate failure. When one follows a law of Perfection, one goes on and on developing, for perfection is never reached, whereas anything so material as money is soon achieved and then what? Maybe death! But following a high ideal and perfecting steps on the way, leads on and on into immortal life!

I shall not go into all the points made in your letter. Suffice it to say that I agree and am with you all the way - it is what is in my own mind. But we must watch our enthusiasms. They are what modern Americans are afraid of because they do not have them. That wonderful word from the Greek - enthusiasm - the "God in me"! What is life without it? A dead thing and life is never dead! What else could prove God? More than all the so-called religions! But we must prove all this yet more positively so we must discipline and watch ourselves. I feel very definitely about this and that we should work out a sort of flexible routine in our work here that will keep us rightly balanced - some work, some quiet for meditation, some study to keep the mind always learning, some leisure, some stimulating conversation, etc. We must have a master plan, which is all contained in D.S. The difficulty will be in taking on too much. That is the great curse of America today. The nothing in excess, the nothing too much, which is the great basic principle of Greek culture, is something we must follow. We must keep in our vision the way of Nature, planting of the little seed which contains within it the whole pattern of its own enfoldment. In America, everything is seen big outside and then collapses and having to begin all over from the little seed!

Some very exciting things have happened lately that I don't want to speak of here just yet but they hold great possibilities for our future. It seems as though all is working out for the realization of the Dream! But remember it is up to us and must be worked for, not dreamed for!

I am much immersed in practical matters now, which I don't love, but know they must be done. The young man who is working in the timber did not come this week so I have to get at him. When you get here that will give him a big push, I know, and I believe you will learn a lot from working in the trees with him some. It hurts me to have them out but I believe it is right when they are ripe as they would only die and be wasted, and one of the great simple things Jay Hambidge said, was "Nature never wastes anything!"

That is a law man has betrayed - Man wastes everything, including himself! Those wonderful trees will help us to realize our dreams practically so that we won't have to go around begging people for help. That I will not do.

I believe that you are an artist and I do not wish to see that precious gift wasted. If I have left things unsaid here just have faith in me as I have in you. I believe in destiny which is the Law. As my poor old friend Vanoppen said, "Who breaks the Law is broken by the Law, for he is one against the Universe!"

10/20/63

I was most interested in the leaves you sent me and can't resist sending you some from Betty's Creek. It's interesting to see the difference in them. Your maple, for instance, is more set and fine in form, but none of your colours are as brilliant as ours! I am tempted to return yours so you can compare this but may keep them. You can find others there. I can hardly walk down the hill without stopping to pick up the new beauties that are constantly falling! The whole country is divinely beautiful and the weather perfect. We are beginning to need a little rain now, especially for the oats planted for the sheep.

11/29/63

The Greeks put it all in a simple, two-word statement: "Know thyself!" This is not so simple as it sounds and takes quite a lifetime. One thing I don't agree with you on - the necessity to decide now whether you will be a painter, a writer or whatever. These come from life, not life from them. The Greeks lived before they wrote - writing developed from living - so it had vitality. Live what you are doing now - give it your best. The rest will develop. It's the fashion (how I detest the word!) to be a writer or a painter and everybody wants to be one or both. As a result we have mediocrities and imitators in both. The herd follow outer fashions, not inner urges. You cannot be yourself till you know yourself. I feel that you have been "a house divided" between trying to be yourself and please your father. You can't do both, and in the end you will please him most by being yourself because then you will be most successful. You are so right in not making money the goal. If you make perfection the goal in whatever you do, the money will come because people will want what you do. If you haven't seen that, you have missed the meaning of dynamic symmetry, for it is the law of perfection in everything. It proves it. Also it is a kind of crucible that bring out the real. Through knowing it you do find yourself. I have seen this happen repeatedly, but others do not see that. So often the ego blinds them to causes. The ego thinks it does it all. It's the Law that does it, and Nature is the Law!

I agree with the fine quotations you sent [from Walden]. Reading such things you absorb them and they become part of you and influence your decisions. Like fertilizer to the plant, they nurture and help the true growth. Then, in time, the fruit just comes. That period of Emerson and Thoreau was the best in our country so far. They were both influenced by study of fine writing and by nature - Emerson by the former and Thoreau by the latter. Emerson left the orthodox church as I remember, and later in life discovered

the Bhagavad Gita and was enthralled by it. He found in it things that came up in himself quite spontaneously. The same experience I had so I understand it. It simply proves that there is a continuity in life and thought. It does not die but is carried on and comes alive or into consciousness in the mind, or soil, that is congenial to it. Thoreau was so right about farming. The greatest Greek thought grew from the simple duties of life and living. That was deep within me and what drew me to weaving, which I had never even seen or known till I went to Greece. Can one learn all about life buried in books and hemmed in by four machine-made walls? One needs nature to give vitality to thought, and vice versa. So one balances the other, and then we come to that wonderful law of balance - order and symmetry - or "measuring together." You should study the Greek language.

11/7/64

Most young people in America need hardships to develop endurance and character. They want too much the easy way! Atlanta, and our whole section, is booming. That's what I fear. No telling what it will bring in. One has to be on the alert. Success is more dangerous than failure.

1/9/65

Three days ago my telephone rang and I heard someone say to another person on the line, "Did you hear that Claude Darnell's place burned to the ground?" You can imagine the shock. But it all proved to be true, and poor Claude and Edith lost nearly everything. However, I was not going to let them make matters worse by grieving so I told him we must start at once to rebuild. He did, and the people on [Betty's Creek] have been wonderful in helping him. The house is up with roof on and is nicer than the old one! I walked over there this afternoon and it looked lovely. He hopes to be in by next week. Then he can finish things by degrees. One evening the women had a shower and Stanton [Forbes], Jean [Reti], and I went. It was really very touching how the people shared what they had. There were sheets, towels, bedspreads and such things for the home and all so nice. We all sat around and chatted, simple refreshments were served and it was all very simple and moving.

Just a few days after that, a German Shepherd dog left here brought forth seven puppies fathered by Philo! They now have their eyes open and are playing around, too adorable for words, and - they all look like Philo! He, incidentally, will have nothing to do with them. There are five males and two females. I am tempted to keep the two females - they are so sweet, soft and playful. But alas, when the mother and Philo got off together they went after my sheep - killed one and wounded three others. Also two baby lambs died. So now the German Shepherd has to be chained. Philo doesn't bother the sheep when he's alone. Incidentally, we have eleven new baby lambs! Some are black as jet, some white, one white with brown spots and one brown with white spots. They are so sweet and little...

...I just reread the letter you wrote me on March 22nd in which you mentioned the book God's Own Junkyard. While I was in New York,

I called up the author and later had a visit with him! He was very nice and I have heard from him since I got back here. They have already begun to ruin our beautiful highway. One can do nothing with these money mad morons. In that same letter you also told me about the fascinating studies you were taking. You must follow the course you have mapped out in the arts, languages, etc. That is where you belong, and don't let anybody temp you into the world of industry and money-making. I have seen the miserable, unhappy, frustrated failures there and the envy they experience for those who have gone in the other direction. Thank God and accept your good fortune that you are what you are!

Always my best to you, and Philo sends you a wag of his beautiful tail. It's not just an ordinary way, but an almost circular whirl. All the puppies have it!

May the "good, the true and the beautiful" always be yours!

2/3/65

Perfection is never reached but is a wonderful goal that lures us on higher and makes life exciting and worthwhile. Material things crumble and pass - the ideal is immortal.

8/8/65

I don't know how I am ever going to clear up all this junk. I have much stuff I have written and many letters, some important. I need help terribly, but alas the worse it gets, the less help I have. Most people who come here want to get something for themselves but not to give of themselves. The mania for being "creative" has taken hold of the masses and they are as mad for that as for mondy. Usually the one is for the purpose of bringing forth the other. I do not believe that anything truly creative can come from greed. That is why most of the stuff being produced in America today will end in the garbage heap.

5/17/66

I have just talked with Mr. Brown at the Rabun Gap School and he says you have accepted the position there verbally. Take it! Exciting things are happening.

5/23/66

As to this summer, I am disappointed. I had planned to start a real school there this year beginning small but based on principals, not profits. I foresaw what you wrote and knew that it was your father in you that would influence you. I'm sorry that you think so much of publicity - it is the curse of our mass world. I have always avoided it. Now I am going to say something that you will misunderstand and not like! I have noticed some deterioration in your work this last year or so - cards, etc. You cannot do your best work and be your highest self if you are pushed and hurried by outside influences. Sometimes if the inner self is sure, it can go straight to the goal without hesitation but that is different from being pushed by outside materialistic influences.

But I am not going to try to influence you. Only you can make the decision. I'd like to have you work with me as I feel we could do something worthwhile for this horrible civilization, which is most certainly headed for destruction. I am sick



Above: Her dress full of apples, she visits the animals around the farm on a daily ritual, collects a flower or two (right), and gets the mail.



to death of this worship of wealth. It has destroyed every civilization of the world. Only a vision of the inner divine purpose of life can create the eternal values. Follow your highest self.

11/12/67

New York has grown so terrible (since I was last here) I can hardly stand it. The mobs, the traffic, the noise drive me crazy. I am actually terrified when I walk on the streets for fear I'll be crushed at any moment! I don't see how it can go on this way much longer . . . Be patient, Eliot. This madness cannot go on. Man is turning back to the sanity of nature!

MARY CROVATT HAMBIDGE AND THE CENTER SHE FOUNDED

- 1885 December 20 - born in Brunswick, Georgia; educated in Brunswick and Cambridge, Massachusetts
- c. 1911 worked in New York City as a model and professional whistler; met her husband, Jay Hambidge, discoverer of "dynamic symmetry" - the design concept used by the classical Greeks
- 1920-21 accompanied Jay Hambidge to Athens, Greece on a trip sponsored by Yale University and there learned to weave under the direction of Kyria Elene Avramea
- 1921 returned to the United States and joined Jay Hambidge as he lectured in the studios of the leading artists of the time. After Jay Hambidge's sudden death in 1924 lived primarily in New York City and Greenwich, Connecticut, designing and weaving clothing based on the principals of dynamic symmetry, including the costumes used by Ted Shawn's dance company in the revival of the Delphic festivals, Delphi, Greece and the costumes for the production of "Phoebus and Pan", Little Theater Opera Company, New York
- 1926-28 spent time in Mountain City, Georgia and there "discovered" the hand-craft heritage of the Appalachians
- 1934-35 moved permanently to Rabun Gap, Georgia and organized the "Weavers of Rabun" — a group of local mountain women who soon gained fame for the quality and beauty of their work
- c. 1935 Eleanor Steel Reece purchased the approximately 700 acres on Bettys Creek Road for Mary Hambidge and began contributing a monthly stipend to support Mary in her efforts to establish the weaving and balanced agrarian life style she envisioned
- 1936 exhibited the work of the Weavers of Rabun in New York City and Greenwich, Connecticut and lectured on the importance of handcrafts to society
- 1937 opened Rabun Studios - a shop on New York's Madison Avenue, which, in addition to the handwoven fabrics produced by the Weavers of Rabun, also featured the work of Georgia Nakashima, Minnie Negro, Virginia and LaGardo Tackett, and others
- received gold medal (Diplome Medialle d'Or) for finest weaving at the Exposition International des Arts et des Techniques, Paris, France
- 1940 lectured, demonstrated, and exhibited spinning and weaving at Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, Savannah, Georgia
- 1941-42 opened The Jay Hambidge School of Dynamic Symmetry and Weaving for one month each summer
- 1944 established The Jay Hambidge Art Foundation as a non-profit public charity for educational and scientific purposes
- Gordon Washburn, Director of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, bought samples of her weavings for the students at the School of Design to study

- 1945 received the commission to weave all of the fabrics for President Truman's yacht, the "Williamsburg"
- 1948 opened the craft shop at The Jay Hambidge Art Foundation
demonstrated and exhibited weaving and spinning at the Davison - Paxon Company, Atlanta, Georgia
- 1949 received the commission to weave the dossal cloth for the chapel of the Presbyterian Church on Madison Avenue, New York
- 1950 exhibited at the Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens
- 1953 fabrics from Rabun Studios were selected for the first exhibition of American design to be circulated in Europe by the U. S. Information Agency
- 1954 exhibited at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia
- 1956 designed fabrics included in an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, entitled "Textiles USA"
- 1958 held an exhibition entitled "Weavers of Rabun" in the Rotunda of the Smithsonian Institution's Arts and Industries Building, Washington, D.C.
- 1960 shifted the focus of her efforts from production weaving to encouraging the creative potential of individual artists by providing, on an informal basis, a mountain retreat thereby opening the Foundation's doors to those who needed a place to work.
- Among those who availed themselves of this opportunity were writer Marguerite Steedman, composer Edwin Gerschefski, sculptor Jeanne Gaevvert, pianist Jean Reti-Forbes, landscape architect, Brooks Wigginton, artist-writer, Stanton Forbes, teacher-writer, Eliot Wigginton and many others.
- 1963 Laura Willis of New York, London, and Paris designed haute couturier fashions, inspired by and using fabrics produced by the Weavers of Rabun
- 1973 June - Mary Creety Nikas, head of an Atlanta interior design firm and former art teacher, a painter and long-time friend of Mary Hambidge, assumed the directorship of the Hambidge Center.
- August 29 — Mary Hambidge died
- 1974 - present the residency program was formalized; individual artists may now apply to stay at the Center for 2 weeks to 2 months from early spring to late fall
a variety of workshops, including weaving and pottery, are scheduled during the summer
concerts, lectures and exhibitions for the community are sponsored from May to October
the facilities are available to groups for conference and retreats when other activities are not scheduled
Eleanor Steel Reece's support ended, memberships to help continue and expand the Center's work were offered for the first time



BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HAMBIDGE CENTER 1934 TO DATE

The Hambidge Center was founded by Mary Crovatt Hambidge in 1934 and incorporated in Rabun County in 1944 primarily to perpetuate the knowledge of hand weaving and the value of the handcrafts as a way of developing one's inner life.

In its early years, the Center was a major employer of women in production weaving. Girls from the community entered the program as apprentices to older women who knew the various processes from carding and spinning to weaving. Under Mary Hambidge's guidance and inspiration the women were taught to work for perfection. The "Weavers of Rabun", as they were known, produced fine quality fabrics designed by Mary Hambidge and sold in a Madison Avenue shop during the late 30's and throughout the 40's.

The work of Mary Hambidge and the Weavers of Rabun won international acclaim-a gold medal at the 1937 Paris Exposition. Their work was shown and demonstrated at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., Georgia Tech, and the University of Georgia in 1958. All the fabrics for President Truman's yacht, "The Williamsburg", were woven at the Center in 1947. After World War II, it was no longer feasible to produce hand weaving on a commercial scale, but the weaving facilities continued to be available for those who wanted to learn to weave. Today the Historic Weave Shed is used for weaving workshops and resident weavers, and is available to local residents who weave.

Since Mary Hambidge's death in 1973, Mary Creety Nikas, a friend and the present Executive Director, has broadened the scope of services within the philosophical framework of the founder.

Artists and writers who needed a peaceful place to work were welcome to use the several houses on the place on an informal basis by Mrs. Hambidge, thus beginning the Residency program. This program was formalized in 1974, with application procedures patterned after the MacDowell Colony. About 15 artists, musicians, composers, writers, dramatists, choreographers, etc. use these facilities each year; about half of them are from Georgia. Applications are now coming from all over the world for the Artists Working Retreat.

In 1975, with the help of a grant from the Georgia Council for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, a complete 10 kick wheel pottery studio was put into an existing pavillion and a gas fired kiln installed. An electric kiln and potter's wheel were added a few years later. The studio is used for regular workshops, for resident potters, and is available to local potters as well.

In addition to the crafts programs, various nature programs and painting, writing, dance, music and basic creative process workshops are offered each season for beginners to advanced students.

Experimental programs for special groups, such as gifted children, scouts, and senior citizens are offered from time to time as well as occassional credit courses primarily for teachers.

The Center's facilities are also available for small conferences, individual and group retreats between programs.

A major addition to the programming at the Center is the concert series and accompanying exhibitions and the lectures which have become a cultural focus for the community.

The more than 600 acres of mountain and valley land with some 15 structures including a log cabin, rock house, spring house, weave shed, residence cottages and grist mill were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 as a rural historic district reflecting 150 years of cultural activity.

Today, through its programs, the Center is dedicated to accelerating the recognition and development in each individual of his or her unique creative potential.

Throughout her long life, after Jay Hambidge's death, Mary Hambidge lived alone. She wrote out her thoughts.

Her notes, mostly penciled, were found scattered through boxes and old suitcases, jotted in small colored notepads, on yellow seconds sheets, on backs of envelopes, whatever paper seemed to be at hand when a thought occurred to her. A perfectionist and an artist, she wrote and rewrote the same thought or poem until her expression reached the classic clarity and simplicity she sought.

In 1975 the Hambidge Center published a book of some of her writing under the title "Apprentice in Creation — the Way is Beauty". The book went into its second printing in 1984. It is available from select book stores or from the Hambidge Center.

The vision that transformed her life, which opens this book, occurred in 1924, shortly after Jay Hambidge's death. Most of the poetry and notes of the same high intensity as the initial experience seem to have been written between 1924 and 1935. We could designate this as the period of the pure vision.

From the late 1930's through the 1950's, when Mary Hambidge's outer life revolved around the creative and administrative responsibilities of the foundation, her inner attention seems to have been increasingly given to the all pervasive problems engendered by the philosophy of materialism and its corollary, mechanism. In anguish and frustration, she saw man's essential creativity drowning in the morass of his own unnatural conceptions. Her writings on materialism and America occur during this period. In addition to her personal commentaries, over the years, seeking to stem the tide, she wrote a passionate stream of appeals to editors, senators, educators, presidents, foreign heads of state. (Extant drafts of these letters will be published in a subsequent volume.) Through it all, she knew this was a passing phase in mankind's history. She foresaw the inevitable breakdown of materialism a generation before the acceleration of events in the late 1960's and early 1970's clearly confirmed this. In her later years, with a touch of resignation, she would say, "They *have* to go through it, don't you know . . ."

After 1960, although she continued correspondence almost to the end of her life, Mary Hambidge seems to have recorded progressively less of her inner life. Perhaps, in ways unknown to us, she had reached the inner "peace that passeth understanding . . ."