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Holmes Dining Room

Central Washington University

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What is in a Name? Holmes Dining Room

Margaret Coffin Holmes gave up her position at Central so her husband, Dr. Otis Halbert “Hal” Holmes, a fellow instructor and the Dean of Men, could continue his career at the university.

It was 1940 and Holmes, who taught English and social studies and had been the Dean of Women for Central Washington College of Education for 10 years, was told she would have to resign because of a wartime regulation stating that public universities could not hire more than one member of the same family.

We don’t know how she felt about being told to resign but we do know from the outpouring of support that appeared in the student newspaper that she was well-respected and well-liked.

“To you our good friend, wise counselor, and favorite Dean of Women, we dedicate this issue of the *Campus Crier*, hoping that in some way you will understand our sincere appreciation of you and of the many things you have done for us,” noted the newspaper.

Holmes was born in 1896 to Yakima Valley pioneers, Stanley and Anna Coffin. She attended Yakima public schools, Reed College in Oregon, and the University of Washington in Seattle, from which she graduated in 1921.

She arrived at Central in 1931, hired to teach English and sociology, and to serve as the Dean of Women, which meant making sure female students living on campus followed the rules regarding curfews and other matters. In 1933, she married Hal Holmes, who was also a sociology professor at Central and Dean of Men.

In addition to her teaching and dean work, Margaret Holmes gained acclaim as a poet and writer. Her published works included college ballads, tribute poems for her colleagues, a book of rhymes for children titled “Out of the Sky” and a book of poetry titled “Polmes by Holmes.” She also had poetry published in the *New Yorker* magazine.

At the time of her resignation from the university, the school paper published one of her poems, “Nola of Kamola,” which told the tongue-in-cheek story of Nola Hicks, a farmer’s daughter who lived in Kamola Hall and who one day played a pianola (a player piano) so long and so hard that it exploded.

About two years after Margaret Holmes left Central, so did her husband, who was elected to the US Congress. Congressman Hal Holmes would go on to serve until 1958 and, later, donated funding to help construct the Hal Holmes Center in Ellensburg.

Hal Holmes was born in Cresco, Iowa, in 1902. At the age of 13, his family moved to Walla Walla, Washington, where he attended public schools. He graduated from Whitman College in 1923 and earned an advanced teaching degree from Columbia University in New York in 1927.

He taught economics at Ellensburg High School in 1924, then was hired to teach at Central in 1925. He returned to Columbia to teach from 1928 to 1929, then rejoined the faculty at Central, where he taught for the next 12 years.

Hal Holmes died in Yakima in 1977 and Margaret Holmes died in Ellensburg in 1983.

When Central constructed a new dining hall in 1960, it named the facility, the Holmes Dining Center, in honor of the Holmes' and their lasting contributions to the university. The structure was expanded two years later and served meals to students for the next four decades.

In 2004, when Central decided to build the Student Union and Recreation Center (SURC) to replace the Samuelson Student Union Building (SUB), it demolished the aging Holmes Dining Center, and built the SURC on the site.

But the Holmes name has continued to live on. The main dining facility within the new SURC was named the Holmes Dining Room.