

Legendary reporter, Roosevelt friend may get her due

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Associated Press

RHINEBECK, N.Y. — The solitary end that befell Lorena Hickok in no way reflected her life as a pioneering reporter, noted author, Depression-era New Dealer or confidante of Eleanor Roosevelt.

Her funeral rites in 1968 were witnessed only by an undertaker. Her ashes sat unclaimed on a shelf for two decades before being buried in an unmarked grave on the back edge of a tree-lined Hudson Valley cemetery.

That's changing now. Several women are seeking to ensure Hickok's memory and place in history with a plaque on her grave and a shade tree she wanted. They also plan to endow a scholarship in Hickok's name.

"I could not believe that no one picked up her ashes — somebody that had made this many contributions," said Linda Boyd Kavars, who is spearheading the effort.

Kavars is raising money to mark the grave and start a Hickok scholarship for female students at Hudson Valley

Hickok started in B.C.

The Enquirer

Lorena Hickok started her reporting career in Battle Creek.

The groundbreaking female reporter and confidante of Eleanor Roosevelt was a reporter for the *Battle Creek Evening News*, a predecessor to the *Enquirer*, for three years.

She went on to work at newspapers in Milwaukee, Minneapolis and New York before joining the Associated Press and beginning her storied relationship with the legendary Mrs. Roosevelt.

colleges. Women's studies programs at Marist College and the state university at New Paltz plan to participate.

Hickok was born in Troy, Wis., in 1893. She became a reporter when it was almost exclusively a man's domain, complete with now-stereotypical scenes of hard living. Hick, as friends called her, fit right in — smoking cigars and playing poker while cultivating a reputation as a fine

According to a 1979 *Enquirer* story, Hickok was born in Troy, Wis., and moved with her parents to North Dakota. When her mother died, she came to Battle Creek at age 16 to make her home with Mr. and Mrs. William Fish, an aunt and uncle, who raised her as a daughter.

She showed ability as a writer in high school and won an oratorical contest. After she graduated from Battle Creek Central High School in 1912, she became a reporter for the newspaper.

writer covering University of Minnesota Gophers football for the *Minneapolis Tribune* and news for The Associated Press in New York City.

Her name was attached to such highly visible stories as the survivors of a 1928 shipwreck — the AP story landed on the front page of *The New York Times* — and the 1932 Lindbergh baby kidnapping.

In 1932, she was sent to cover Eleanor Roosevelt, whose hus-



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Lorena Hickok, left, Paul Person, Governor of the Virgin Islands, and Eleanor Roosevelt in the Caribbean in 1934.

band was running for president. They hit it off and grew to be close friends, so close that Hickok felt she could no longer objectively report on the Roosevelts.

Just months after Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential inauguration, Hickok abandoned her reporting career in 1933 to write field reports for the administration from the front lines of the Depression. Her flair for prose didn't abandon her.

"A Promised Land, bathed in golden sunlight, is rising out of the gray shadows of

want and squalor and wretchedness down here in the Tennessee Valley these days," she wrote in a report to FDR aide Harry Hopkins.

She lived in the White House during World War II, and her influence on Mrs. Roosevelt soon became apparent.

She is credited with nudging the new first lady into activism and giving her the idea for her daily newspaper column, *My Day*. It was also her suggestion that Mrs. Roosevelt hold weekly news conferences that only female reporters

could attend, giving more women entry into the field.

She later followed the widowed Mrs. Roosevelt to Hyde Park, N.Y.

Some historians imply a sexual relationship between the two women: Mrs. Roosevelt expressed in her correspondences her longing to hug Hickok, who wrote in turn of wanting to kiss her friend.

However, Doris Kearns Goodwin, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the Roosevelt White House, *No Ordinary Time*, quotes a friend of Mrs. Roosevelt and a former Roosevelt Library director who both doubted any physically intimate relationship existed. The pair believe Mrs. Roosevelt saw Hickok as someone to whom she could reveal her emotions.

When Mrs. Roosevelt died in 1962, a distraught and ailing Hickok was absent from the funeral. Instead, a minister drove her close to the cemetery near midnight so she could say goodbye in private and leave wildflowers at the grave.

Hickok, in her latter years the author of such books as *The Story of Helen Keller* and *The Story of Eleanor Roosevelt*, died on May 1, 1968. No friends claimed her ashes and they eventually were buried alongside other unclaimed remains at Rhinebeck Cemetery.

That might have been the end of Hickok's story if not for Patsy Costello, who worked at the Hyde Park drugstore where Hickok used to buy her newspaper. In early 1998, she was inspired to find Hickok's grave after seeing a play produced by Kavars called *Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt: A Love Story*.

"I thought it was a shame that she would be buried in an unmarked grave ...," said Costello, who contacted Kavars.

The marker, bench and dogwood will be dedicated May 1, the anniversary of Hickok's death. The marker will remember her as "author, AP reporter, activist, change agent and friend of Eleanor Roosevelt."

Former resident's quest: Notice for reporter

North Iowa native Kavars is working to get pioneer the recognition she deserves

By KRISTIN BUEHNER
Of The Globe-Gazette

MASON CITY — Honoring the memory of pioneer woman reporter Lorena Hickok has become the personal cause of a Mason City native.

Linda Boyd Kavars, 58, producer of Great Dames Productions in Kingston, N.Y., had never even heard of Hickok — the first woman reporter for The Associated Press — when she chanced to see a play about her three years ago.

"The play was about Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt," Kavars said Friday, during a brief visit home. "I thought, how could there be this person who did all these important things and I've never even heard of her?"

Kavars contacted the actress and went on to produce a tour of the play that ran for three years on the East Coast.

Nicknamed "Hick," Lorena Hickok became a close confidante of Eleanor Roosevelt after covering Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaign for president in 1932. Taking a federal position after FDR was elected in 1933, Hickok was the impetus for Eleanor Roosevelt's "women only" press conferences and helped open the eyes of the first lady to poverty during the Depression.

Hickok is credited with helping Eleanor Roosevelt communicate her social activism to the



Kavars



Hickok

Courage," "The Story of Helen Keller" and "The Story of Eleanor Roosevelt."

When Kavars learned that Hickok had died impoverished and a relative unknown, her ashes unclaimed for 20 years and then buried in an unmarked grave in a Hudson Valley cemetery, she decided to take up the cause.

KAVARS, WHO FOR 20 YEARS WORKED as a producer and manager in the music business in Los Angeles, spearheaded an effort among friends and neighbors to raise money for a grave marker and memorial for Hickok.

In her graveside memorial, Hickok will be remembered as "author, AP reporter, activist, change agent and friend of Eleanor Roosevelt."

The Lorena Hickok Memorial and Scholarship

American people.

The only AP woman reporter to cover major national events such as the Lindbergh kidnapping and subsequent trial, Hickok also authored many books, including "Ladies of

Fund was also formed to raise scholarship money for needy female students in public policy, journalism or women's studies at Marist College, SUNY at New Paltz College and Vassar College.

Last fall, a "Remember Hick" concert by singer-songwriters Janis Ian and Lauren Wood at SUNY New Paltz college raised money to purchase a grave marker, stone bench and dogwood tree, Kavars said.

On May 10, in the Rhinebeck (New York) Cemetery, the Lorena Hickok Memorial will be dedicated at a brief graveside ceremony. A benefit luncheon will follow the ceremony at the Beekman Arms in Rhinebeck. Blanche Wiesen Cook, a biographer of Eleanor Roosevelt, is featured speaker.

Among dignitaries scheduled to attend is a grand-daughter of Eleanor Roosevelt, Kavars said.

In the evening, actress Nan Brooks will perform her one-woman "An Evening with Eleanor Roosevelt" at The West Strand Grill in Kingston and again on May 12 at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie. Proceeds will benefit the Lorena Hickok Scholarship Fund.

The Hickok project is the latest in a series of human rights causes championed by Kavars, who has raised money through plays and concerts she has produced on the East Coast.

"I guess I was in the right place at the right time," she said. "Lorena Hickok has done so many things and helped so many people, and she would have been written right out of history."