



*Carolyn Rosenstein
Falk
1902–1994*

Founder of the
Falk, Lichten & Rosenstein Fund
The New York Community Trust
909 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022



*Carolyn's Class Photo
Smith College 1923*

Smith College Archives

In an age when the privileged daughters of wealthy New York families often were content to enjoy youthful good times capped by an early and proper marriage, Carolyn Rosenstein was something of an oddity. Unlike her two pretty and popular younger sisters, she chose to pursue a career in science, making her way in the challenging field of bacteriological research. Parties did not interest her; laboratory work did. Family members were puzzled at first by her choice, but the young Carolyn was always strong-willed and independent and remained so until her death.

"We all knew she had a brilliant mind," said her sister-in-law, Helene Linenthal, one of the few family members who remained on relatively intimate terms over six decades. "Ours was 'The Great Gatsby Crowd,' but Carolyn, by choice, stayed outside."

The Rosensteins owned an estate overlooking the Hudson River near Tarrytown and all three daughters were schooled privately at Miss Mason's, but Carolyn alone went on to Smith College.

While at school, she joined a group of undergraduates who regularly attended religious services at St. John's Episcopal Church on campus. Although the Rosensteins were Jewish, Carolyn was drawn to the Anglo-Catholic teachings and formally converted. From then on, science and devotion to her newly adopted faith became major forces in her life.

After graduation in 1923, she returned home and secured a beginner's position in a laboratory. These were difficult times for a newcomer, and particularly a woman. Initially, she worked as a volunteer at the Department of Health, either driving herself to work in Manhattan or staying at the family's Manhattan apartment. After the customary four months' probation, she passed the Civil Service examination and was hired as a laboratory assistant in bacteriology. Two years later, she passed the bacteriology examination but had to wait another four years for an appointment.

Carolyn was very enthusiastic about her work—an enthusiasm reflected in letters to Smith College: "The work is getting increasingly interesting." "The Typhoid epidemic of 1925 was our first big thrill, and we've had several lesser ones in the 'Parrot Fever' epidemic in 1929 and the more recent 'Infantile Paralysis' one."

Promotions were coming her way. The Department put her in charge of sterility testing on all biological products it distributed. She also was publishing medical papers, and several of her articles appeared in the *American Journal of Public Health* and in the *Journal of Experimental Medicine* from 1926 through 1932.

The laboratory work with toxins and antibiotics had its moments of crisis: On one occasion, she accidentally swallowed a substance with potentially lethal effect. Quickly, she reached for an effective antidote—she gulped a full tumbler of pure alcohol. Later, she enjoyed retelling the story of her experience, often adding that it provided lasting immunity to ill effects from any amount of alcohol—insisting that it allowed her without worry to indulge in her favorite cocktail, a whiskey sour.

At the Department of Health, she met a fellow researcher, Dr. K. George Falk, who was trained as a biochemist and was a graduate of Columbia University and the University of Strassburg. He also was a professor of chemical bacteriology in preventive medicine at New York University's School of Medicine. She was 33. Dr. Falk, a widower, was in his 50s. The two were married on October 16, 1935. A rabbi and an Episcopal minister officiated at their wedding.

The couple had no children. Their shared interest in science research apparently made it a companionable union. During summer vacations, they traveled or spent their holidays on Nantucket. Carolyn had infrequent contacts with her family except for Mrs. Linenthal, who had been married to her only brother, Louis Rosenstein, Jr., who was killed during World War II. Mrs. Linenthal has recollections of the Falks enjoying their summers contentedly sitting on the veranda of the White Elephant Inn in their rockers, often buried in medical papers, and seemingly not needing to communicate with others.

On all their outings, Dr. Falk was satisfied to leave the automobile driving to his wife and she was only too happy to oblige. She would continue to drive until she was incapacitated by age and illness. She received her last license renewal when she was 90, apparently without difficulty because her record was unblemished—never an accident.

Carolyn apparently had no misgivings about being the “second” wife. When she moved into Dr. Falk’s richly decorated apartment in the East Sixties, she left a large oil painting of his late wife, Dora, prominently displayed.

After her husband’s death in 1953, Carolyn seemed less eager to pursue her medical career. She spent more time at her summer home in Brewster on Cape Cod overlooking the water, always accompanied by her beloved Yorkshire terriers.

Increasingly she devoted herself to the church, both as a member of Church Women United, the Council of Churches, and also at her parish in New York, the Church of the Resurrection.

Father Allan Warren recalls her enthusiastic and generous support for the Church’s charities. She directed a number of its fundraising activities, annually giving a High Tea at her home where she always provided church benefactors with a jar of her own homemade preserves. And Thomas Rae, the Church’s long-time treasurer, has a vivid image: “At Easter, she always wore a black straw hat with flowers—she only wore it to Church once a year.” This was as close to vanity as she cared to come. Her sister-in-law and the few friends who outlived her agree that

she was reluctant to be photographed, rarely spoke about herself, and was never seen to wear the jewelry she inherited.

Carolyn also became a devoted supporter of the Sisters of Mary Convent in Peekskill and of the work of St. Mary’s In-the-Field, an Episcopal order that has helped teenage runaways who wind up in the courts.

In her late years, when she had to use a cane and movement was restricted, she developed a passion for entering contests. It was a way of using her still active intellect and she subscribed to scores of publications to pursue her hobby. She also discovered television game shows and soap operas. But whatever she watched or read, she ended the day reading her Bible.

Carolyn died in 1994, 92 years old. Under her will, a few small bequests were made to relatives or to her care-givers and to provide for her pets. There were provisions for both Smith College and the Church of the Resurrection in New York, and for her favorite charities. But the bulk of her fortune was left to The New York Community Trust to support scientific research relating to public health.

“She always was hoping for cures for disease. That’s what she wanted,” reflected Mrs. Linenthal. Carolyn’s fund at The New York Community Trust memorializes her parents, Pearl and Louis Rosenstein; her husband and Dora, his first wife; and cousins of Dr. Falk, Morris and Louise Lichten.

*New York Community Trust
is a community foundation
which provides centralized management
for charitable funds.*

*New York's major banks serve as trustees.
Trustee for the Falk, Lichten & Rosenstein Fund
is Chase Manhattan Bank.*

