

Devoted to WILKES

AL AND JANE LAMPE GROH SAY COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS MARKED THE INSTITUTION FROM ITS BEGINNING

By Kim Bower-Spence



Al and Jane Groh still live in the Kingston, Pa., home where they were married in 1977. PHOTO BY MARK GOLASZEWSKI

AL GROH'S ASSOCIATION WITH Wilkes spans every decade of its 75-year existence. He arrived on the campus of Bucknell University Junior College as a student in 1939, returned less than a decade later to teach at BUJC, Wilkes College and Wilkes University, and still maintains a close relationship and affection for the institution that gave him not only an education but a career, a mission — and wife Jane Lampe Groh.

The Wilkes-Barre native and 1941 BUJC graduate recalls walking by the fledgling institution's buildings on his way to Boy Scouts. His parents encouraged him to attend the local junior college.

Classes, each with about 20 students, took place in the original Conyngham Hall, lost to fire in 1968. Groh helped pay his way by working on the maintenance staff. "One of the things I did was clean the gutters on Chase Hall."

After studying English, speech, drama, economics, sociology and music at BUJC, Groh and fellow student Muriel Rees enrolled at Syracuse University

1933

Bucknell opens junior college

1934

BUJC takes over entire former Business College building

1935

Director John Eisenhauer resigns

First issue of *Bison Stampede* is published



1936

Eugene Farley becomes director

First issue of *Bucknell Beacon* published

School anthem is published



with the help of Norma Sanguiliano, then dean of women and director of thespians at BUJC. “She drove us up and introduced us to the campus” — a six-hour trek in 1941. Groh majored in English, journalism, radio and theater.

With World War II brewing, Groh had enlisted in the service before heading off to Syracuse. He was called up the March before his scheduled graduation; he and other soldiers received their degrees on time anyway. Groh flew 50 missions as an engineer gunner in the U.S. Air Force stationed in Foggia, Italy, in 1943–44.

Upon his return to Wilkes-Barre, Groh worked at his father’s Studebaker dealership for a year. Then Sanguiliano asked him to replace her as BUJC’s director of theater when she left to marry. A garage behind Chase Hall — a replica of the stately mansion — served as the theater for his production of *Barretts of Wimpole Street*, depicting the real-life romance of poets Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. Groh began teaching English, speech and theater at Wilkes in 1948 and never left.

Groh recalls enthusiastic support from the community, with local shops donating costumes and citizens attending performances. The Wilkes-Barre Kiwanis Club sponsored musicals from the 1950s through the 1970s. Groh spearheaded efforts to build the Dorothy Dickson Dart Center for the Performing Arts, completed in 1965.

In 1952, he organized the first annual United Nationalities Pageant. He wrote the script and recruited Trustee Annette Evans to narrate the event celebrating Wilkes-Barre’s unique blend of ethnicities.

“We wanted to emphasize the strengths of each of these ethnic groups and preserve their customs and costumes and food,” Groh explains. “I thought it was important for people of different faiths and backgrounds to work cooperatively together.”

The first program featured songs and dances from the Jewish, African American, Greek, Swedish, Syrian, Slovak, Irish, Italian, Polish, Lithuanian, Welsh and Russian communities. It opened with the *Star-Spangled Banner* and closed with *America the Beautiful*. The effort continues today as the Fine Arts Fiesta, held each May on Public Square.

Wilkes’ commitment to embracing and respecting all faiths and nationalities was one of the things that attracted Jane Lampe to Wilkes in 1969.

She had worked at colleges in Illinois and Massachusetts and was attending a conference in Atlanta when Farley interviewed her for dean of women. “I was struck by the fact that the president would be interviewing people,” she says. “What impressed me about Dr. Farley

“What is a dream but a man’s life
As he would want it to be,
That shapes itself through all his
days In the Light of Eternity.”

– From *A College is Built in the Image of Truth*,
written for Eugene S. Farley by Al Groh, 1957

was that he talked a little bit about the college, and then he talked extensively about the students. That just hit me right between the eyes. This is the kind of place I wanted to be.”

An interview on campus with George Ralston “iced the cake,” she continues. “You couldn’t help but absorb that pervasive commitment.”

Groh and Lampe married in 1977 in the living room of the Kingston, Pa., home they still share. Al retired in 1987; Jane in 1997. But they’ve maintained close ties and boast a strong affection for the institution.

Groh’s pride in Wilkes and the value of education shines through in his prolific poetry, which he started writing in ninth grade. His work fills four books and includes verses celebrating occasions like Wilkes anniversaries, colleagues’ birthdays and each Fine Arts Fiesta. “I don’t write as frequently as I used to, but I write for an occasion or event.”

But Lampe Groh adds: “He’s still filling lots of notebooks.”

1937

Admiral Harold Stark donates family home, now Chase Hall



Bertha Conyngham donates her home, which becomes the first college-owned building

New BUJC Alumni Association organizes first outing

1943



HQ 6th Training Detachment, Aircrew, unit activated (Flyboys)