



Harriet Hocter

Harriet Hocter, famous ballet dancer, was born in Hoosick Falls, NY, on September 25, 1905. She was the daughter of Timothy and Elizabeth Kearney Hocter. Her father was a monument engraver. The family lived at 148 Church Street, Hoosick Falls. Harriet was one of four children. She had two brothers, John and Frank, and a sister Eloise. John was the golf pro at the Hoosick Falls Country Club for a while.

Harriet started dancing at a young age and appeared in local minstrel shows. She appeared in the annual Walter A. Wood Company Minstrels to benefit the Hoosac Chapter American Red Cross, held on May 13 and 14, 1918, at age 13. The program for this show is found in the Louis Miller Museum.

At age 12, her aunt, Annie Kearney, took Harriet to New York City to study dance. Annie Kearney would act as her chaperone as she traveled the country in Vaudeville. She played in famous Vaudeville theaters like the Palace, the Roxy and the Paramount in New York City as well as the Hippodrome in London. Harriet shared billing with such performers as Jack Benny, George Jessel, Bill Robinson, and George and Gracie Allen. She studied ballet with famous teachers in the United States and London.

In 1920, Harriet had her Broadway debut in the chorus of the Jerome Kern musical "Sally." Her ballet roles included "Topsy and Eva" in 1924 to 1926, "A La Carte" in 1927, "The Three Musketeers" in 1927, "Show Girl" in 1929, and "Simple Simon" in 1930. In the 1920s Harriet won consistent praise from Brooks Atkinson, then the theater critic for the New York Times. He said she "is like a willow wand in the spring," and that she had an ability to evoke "stirring surrealist images" through her dancing.

From 1931 to 1932 Harriet appeared in London. She danced in "Dying Swan" at Rockefeller Center in 1932. She went on to dance in the Ziegfeld Follies. In 1936 Harriet danced in the movie "The Great Ziegfeld," and in the 1937 movie, "Shall We Dance," with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

In the beginning of the 1940's she danced and choreographed revues for Bill Rose's Night Club *The Diamond Horseshoe*. In 1945, Harriet started a ballet school in Boston, which she ran and taught full time until 1974. A number of current ballerinas state that they studied under Harriet Hocter. The school was known around the world.

In an interview in 1930 Harriet said, "People thought I was meant to be a dancer when I was a child because I could take my hair ribbons off with my feet." She was double-jointed and was able to dance on her toes as she arched her back until her long hair touched the floor. She was able to travel the length of the stage in this position. When she danced in the Ziegfeld Follies in Boston, the newspapers gave her rave reviews. For example: *The Boston Traveler*: "Harriet Hocter, who appears

much too seldom, has one memorable opportunity to display her exquisite grace in “Night Flight.” *Boston Post*: “Harriet Hocter, the lovely ballerina, was lovely as ever and effective as always.” *Boston Globe*: “Miss Hocter’s best moment is when she holds the stage by herself in the impressionistic dance called ‘Night Flight.’”

She danced into the late 40’s and taught at her ballet school in Boston until 1974, when she retired. She moved to Lorton, Virginia and died there on June 11, 1977. Her body was brought back to Hoosick Falls and she is buried in St. Mary’s Cemetery.