

# Warmth, humor of Mrs. Weber linger

By ROSALIND STANLEY  
Pikeville bureau chief

PIKEVILLE, Ky. — Marguerite Weber was buried Monday afternoon and with her a rich part of local history also was laid to rest.

Marguerite and her husband Arkady came to Pikeville in 1951, after escaping from Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution in November of 1917. Their struggle for freedom was a long and painful one and the Webers were a couple without a country for 30 years, until finally gaining U.S. citizenship in 1954.

Marguerite Fedotoff Weber was born May 30, 1900, in Old St. Petersburg, Russia. She was the daughter of a Swiss mother who taught French to the children of the Grand Duke Constantine, cousin of Tsar Nicholas II, and a father who was a member of the Russian diplomatic corps stationed in France.

Due to her mother's position, Marguerite was allowed to attend the famous Smolny Institute, an exclusive school for the daughters of noble families. There she studied languages and general subjects. The institution later became a stronghold for the Bolsheviks.

About the time of her graduation from Smolny, Marguerite was married to a young Russian soldier named Nicholas Andreeva. They had a daughter that Marguerite named Suzanne.

The revolution in Russia occurred on Nov. 6, 1917, and Marguerite often recalled the horror of that time. She was working as a nurse at a St. Petersburg Hospital. When the shooting broke out, Marguerite attended to the wounded.

"The Bolsheviks had seized the palace of the ballerina and the mosque and were machine-gunning the streets. There were many wounded and we had to take care of them," she later recalled.

Within a day of the overthrow of the government, the Bolsheviks had seized the railroad stations, the banks, the power station, all the bridges and the telephone station. Old St. Petersburg became Leningrad — a name that Marguerite would refuse to call her beloved city for the rest of her life.

The "intelligentisia," as persons of Marguerite's stature were called, lived in fear for their lives after the revolt. Life, itself, became an ordeal. She lost her job at the hospital; all her valuables were taken from her or sold to purchase food for the household.

"We had a life full of anxiety and fear," Marguerite recalled. "The nights were sleepless because that's when groups of soldiers, armed with rifles and preceded by commissars, were searching the private homes and arresting people just for the reason of being from another social class than the proletariat."

The horror of the revolt proved to much for the weak heart of Nicholas Andreeva. He died shortly after the revolution began. The priceless valuables owned by Marguerite's family, including many works of art and old Russia icons, were either confiscated by the soldiers or sold by the family to buy food.

One day Marguerite could stand it no longer. She sewed the remaining family valuables into the lining of her clothing and



**VETERAN TEACHER** — This photo is taken from a 1975 Pikeville College yearbook, just before Marguerite Weber retired from the Art Department she founded and headed.

set off on pretense of taking Suzanne for a walk in the city.

She and the child were able to make their way to Siberia where they roamed with others in search of escape, walking in snow drifts that at times rose over their heads.

Many starved to death. Marguerite had to leave behind her three-year-old daughter when exposure and lack of food killed the child.

Through sheer will, Marguerite finally made her way to Mukden, China. To avoid detection, Marguerite tied a scarf around her head leaving only her face exposed and had a photograph taken to use on a fake passport.

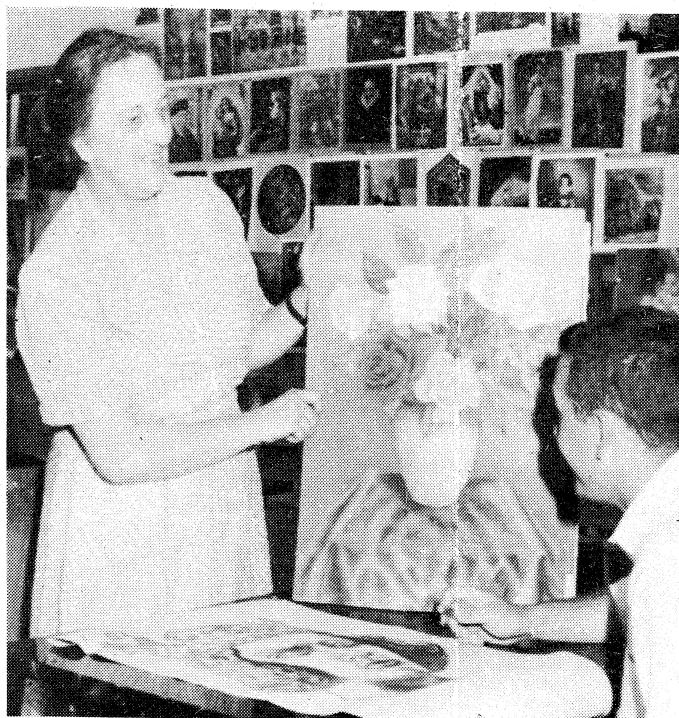
In Mukden, she met and fell in love with another refugee, Arkady Weber. They were married in May of 1937 at the St. Pokrovskaya Church of Tientsin, China.

Travels of the couple took them to Tsingtao, Hong Kong and Chefoo in northern China. Later they traveled to Shanghai where they spent 10 years, Marguerite teaching school and Arkady as an orchestra director. Their prosperity was shortlived, however, when communism again drove them from their home.

The armies of Chiang Kaishek quickly weakened under repeated attacks by the Chinese communists. Arkady and Marguerite were on the last ship out of Shanghai before the city fell to the Reds.

Rather than return to Russia, the government requesting their return, the Webers chose to continue their journeys in search of freedom. After two years in Rio de Janeiro, the Webers finally entered the U.S. and preceded to Pikeville, Ky., where freedom came along with U.S. citizenship in 1954.

The Webers, were by then, firmly attached at Pikeville College, where Arkady taught music and Marguerite established and headed the Art Department. The Webers occupied a log cabin on the site at Pikeville College where the Bears Den, a student lounge, is now located.



**AT HER WORK** — Marguerite Weber is shown with one of the many art students she instructed over the years at Pikeville College.

The Webers, being childless, adopted the students at Pikeville College as their children. So beloved were the Webers in the little community of Pikeville, that streets were blocked off and a public party tossed when they gained their citizenship.

Marguerite, who often said that she had lost everything she owned three times, lived simply for the rest of her days, collecting no valuables save some precious Russia books and icons.

During her years in Pikeville, Marguerite made many friends. People were impressed by her vast first-hand knowledge of history. Many times she was called upon to lecture and she enthusiastically told of her search for freedom and what living in America meant to her.

Friends remember her warmth and her strong sense of humor that never failed her.

Found among her papers after her death was one entitled "Parable of ism."

It read:

**Socialism**—If you own two cows, you give one to your neighbor;

**Communism**—If you own two cows, give them to the government and the government gives you some milk;

**Fascism**—You keep the cows, give the milk to the government and they sell it back to you;

**New Dealism**—Shoot one cow, milk the other and pour the milk down the drain;

**Nazism**—The government keeps the cows;

**Capitalism**—You sell on bill.

Arkady Weber died in 1975, a year that Marguerite retired from Pikeville College, and is buried in Memorial Park, Pikeville.

Marguerite Weber died today, only a couple of hours before her birthday on May 31, 1990, beside her husband.