She Advises Hundreds of Men

By Jane A. Bennett

Helen Warren has a charming hand in all sorts of things involving the social life of the college—particularly the what and how of etiquette for students.

The heart of the RPI campus, socially, is the Clubhouse. Students, administrators and faculty come and go there; the extracurricular life of the campus centers there. And it is there that Helen Liddle Warren, director of social activities, has her headquarters.

In the pleasant room at the end of the hall on the second floor, Mrs. Warren dispenses wise counsel, stimulating conversation, coffee (if you get there at the right time), and sometimes mild rebuke.

At one of the times when coffee was being dispensed to a small group which included several students, the question was asked, "Just what does the social director do?"

Various specific jobs were mentioned, but the students present had one definite, strongly felt idea. As one of them expressed it, "The important thing is that she is someone to come in and talk to—especially about matters that men don't handle as well."

Committee heads and social chairmen "come in and talk to" Mrs. Warren and from these conferences come many of the little extra touches which mean so much to campus functions, and to the campus.

For several weeks before each of the big dance week ends Mrs. Warren is deluged with requests for rooms for dates. Troy residents, who have rooms to rent, have contacted her too, so she acts as a clearing house and "date meets room." Mrs. Warren readily admits that her only advertising is word of mouth among the various landladies. She depends upon good will created by the students. To each her warning is "Now be sure that you or your date drops Mrs. X a note of thanks afterward—even if you are paying her hard cold cash."

Each year in the Introduction to Engineering course required for freshmen, Mrs. Warren speaks twice to each class on social customs, covering such topics...
as introduction, issuing and replying to invitations, and the generous use of "please" and "thank you."

She has compiled a booklet touching on various points of etiquette frequently arising in a college community which is distributed to the neophyte engineers. It Mrs. Warren deals with general etiquette in refreshing easy-to-understand style. On eating she says: "Don't take such large mouthfuls that you resemble a chipmunk. . . . Don't allow your head to fall into your soup"; on dress: "Dirty, messy clothes are never acceptable on a college campus — the work isn't that rough. Shirts hanging in ripples around the waist are not attractive. Tuck them in. . . . What you wear (and how) is indicative of what you are"; on speech: "You came to college to learn. Learn to speak properly — no extra charge."

Early each year Mrs. Warren works with the committee for the Phalanx dance for freshmen. Invitations are sent out to freshmen at girls' colleges and professional schools in the area. Transportation is provided by Phalanx. At last year's dance more than five hundred danced to the music of the Campus Serenaders.

There are two or three Union hops each year. These are strictly "date dances" but Mrs. Warren, in addition to handling many of the details of the dances, gets dates for students who want them.

Each Sunday afternoon Lounge 15 is the scene of a tea dance, another of the events under her direction. From four to six the Campus Serenaders play for dancing, and tea, coffee and cake are served by faculty or student wives. Here "boy meets girl" because the girls are invited from nearby colleges and schools or upon the recommendation of a faculty member. Mrs. Warren originated the idea of the tea dances several years ago. She has overcome objections to their being held on Sundays and has painstakingly guided them along until they have become the pleasant and popular affairs they are today.

For the first two week ends of the year Lounge 15 is open to freshmen on Saturday and Sunday evenings with "coke, cake and games — but no girls. It gives the boys a chance to relax and get acquainted."

She takes particular pains to help the freshmen get into the swing of college life each fall, encouraging them to drop their shyness and to get out and meet people. "Have you been to the tea dances? No? What's the matter? You ought to get out and meet some girls around here."

For Interfraternity Week-end when freshmen were not allowed at fraternity parties, the class held a post-game hop in Lounge 15 and a buffet supper was served in the new dining hall for the first year men and their dates.

During her years as social director Mrs. Warren has found which tailors will give the best prices on tuxedo rentals and alterations and which florists make the prettiest corsages within the range of student budgets. And with each suggestion she makes comes the familiar "Tell them I sent you over."

She is always ready with refreshment suggestions when social chairmen of the numerous campus groups seek advice. "Don't have cider and doughnuts. Everyone has had that this fall. I'd like to see you serve punch and sandwiches and cake. I have a good recipe for punch that will cost you $3.75 for the crowd you expect. Order cake from the dining hall, then tell Mr. Atwood how much you have left and ask him how many sandwiches he can give you for that amount. Since this is your first student-faculty meeting, you want to make it stand out."

Mrs. Warren is a frequent dinner guest and speaker at the various fraternity houses and is on hand to help the fraternities when they give their customary parties for their neighbors.

During mid-winter reviews and the semester exam period free coffee is served daily from one to four in the Clubhouse lounge under the supervision of the social director. Students are encouraged to take a few minutes from their studying and stop by the lounge to relax.

All student organizations, which meet in the social rooms of the Clubhouse or the 15th Street Lounge, book meeting places and dates through Mrs. Warren. Each organization is registered in her office, and all vie for such choice spots as the Clubhouse lounge or the comfortable lobby of Lounge 15. Five other rooms in the two buildings are used for meetings as well. Mrs. Warren also draws up the weekly calendar of campus events.

She herself lists "dispensing thumb tacks" as one of her duties. This, along with loaning out lettering pens, and sewing chevrons on ROTC uniforms were doubtless not considered part of the social director's duties when the post was created, but requests for these and numerous other small services are received.

The steady stream of callers in the cheery office includes not only students, but faculty members and college officers. Afternoon coffee hour may find a faculty member, the interfraternity president, and another student gathered in Mrs.

Mrs. Warren serves coffee to students who drop in to discuss social affairs. Does this seem an odd picture for an engineering college? Not at Rensselaer, where familiarity with the social amenities is part of students' training.
Warren's office. There is always enough hot water in the pot for one more cup of coffee or tea.

Since she is always ready to lend a sympathetic ear to problems, many of the student officers are frequent visitors. But they come just as often to chat as they do to seek advice.

The second floor room in the Clubhouse bears little resemblance to a conventional office. Such standard equipment as desk and telephone is there, but a glass front bookcase replaces file cabinets. Draperies at the window, a rug on the floor, comfortable chairs, a sofa and little tables establish an atmosphere of informality and friendliness characteristic of the room's occupant, a vivacious woman of medium height with graying hair fluffed around a friendly, mobile face.

Students often come to Mrs. Warren for ideas for wedding, anniversary or baby presents. She suggests a number of items or, when time permits, goes herself to look for suitable gifts.

**Fraternity** social chairmen seeking gifts for week-end party chaperons are told "I'd like to see you make it something they can live without, but don't have to, thanks to you. Go to Mr. — and be sure to tell him I sent you. He's very nice to our boys. If what you want costs $12.50, maybe he'll let you have it for $10, if that's all you can spend."

Writing notes of thanks or sympathy and replies to invitations presents a problem at times to Rensselaer students. One young man wishing to express his thanks to the donor of the scholarship he had won came for help. "I wrote several and none of them sounded right, so I came to you. All I could come up with was 'thank you.'"

Mrs. Warren's skillful questioning soon brings out bits of information to incorporate into the letter. "If anything I suggest doesn't sound like you, change it. We don't want to use any words you wouldn't use.'"

Bridge parties in the Clubhouse lounge held Friday evenings at intervals throughout the year under her direction have become very popular. These draw faculty members and their wives as well as students, with or without dates.

A series of dancing lessons is given by instructors of the Arthur Murray studios each year in the fall. Three classes for beginners and one for the more advanced dancers were held weekly, and each reached its capacity of 40 men.

Mrs. Warren's many activities do not stop with student affairs. She arranges details for numerous administrative functions. As a member of the local committee for the Industrial Council she plans the receptions which open the sessions and the morning coffee hours. Arranging flowers around the Field House and on the long dining tables is also her responsibility.

Helen Warren is RPI's first social director. She came to the post in 1947 following six years as superintendent of Samaritan Hospital in Troy. During her seven years as director of the Day Student House at Russell Sage College, Mrs. Warren found time to take courses there and received a B.A. degree, in addition to her R.N. earned at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City.

College administrators set a high value on her work with the students. They feel that an RPI education should do more than train engineers; that it should help them to become socially poised. They regard the "rounding out" process in the social amenities as the province of the social director and feel that Mrs. Warren is unique for the post at RPI. Her keen sense of humor, genuine interest in people and a backlog of experience dealing with their problems are high qualifications for the job. As a member of an old Troy family and a resident of the city for many years, she bridges the traditional gap between "town and gown." Administrators feel that she often helps students in presenting their sides of problems. They also laughingly accuse her of running a marriage bureau. Naturally, some of the dates she has arranged have developed into romance and marriage.

With a student body the size of that at RPI there are some to whom Mrs. Warren is just a lady who speaks on etiquette early in their freshman year. To others she is someone who gets rooms for their dates for big week ends. But to many she is "someone to come to." And that is the way she likes it best.

**Fourth G-E Program Held on R.P.I. Campus**

Fifty-one high school teachers of mathematics from nine northeastern states and the District of Columbia were registered for the fourth General Electric Mathematics Fellowship Program which opened at Rensselaer on July 4.

During the six weeks of lectures and conferences on modern methods of teaching mathematics there were field trips to General Electric plants and to the Troy shop of W. and L. E. Gurley. Two dinners were held jointly with the teachers attending the Union College science program sponsored by the company.

Dr. Edwin B. Allen, head of mathematics at Rensselaer, is director of the program and faculty included Dr. Kenneth H. Moore of physics and Professors DiMaly and James D. Campbell of mathematics.