



by Lois Carol Wheatley

Black Mountain College has attained near-mythical stature for the prominent roles it played in modern art, in the Beat poetry movement, and as a groundbreaking experiment in sociology. From its inception in 1933 until its closing in 1955, the college was populated by nonconformists and free thinkers who, for over two decades, furiously argued the issues of democracy, education, African Americans, Communists, and homosexuals amidst a flurry of progressive painting, sculpting, music, and poetry. While many remarkable milestones were achieved on this remote mountain site near Asheville, North Carolina, most of the enduring legacy was artistic rather than actual significant social reform. African Americans were tolerated on guest status only; Communism entered the debate only as a McCarthy-era sort of discussion topic; and homosexuality would not become generally accepted until the college's last years.

As I noted in my bibliographic article on the "Women in Waiting" of Black Mountain College (hereafter, BMC), published in *NCLR's* 1995 (BMC) issue, leading sources on the college – Fielding Dawson's *The Black Mountain Book*, Martin Duberman's *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, Mary Emma Harris's *The Arts at Black Mountain*

I had to persuade my parents that BMC was a kind of cosmopolitan finishing school. Actually it was the kind of school you never finish, because at our best we remain Black Mountain College students as we set our own standards as long as we live.

– Ingeborg Lauterstein