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Living Large: Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason **A Tender Love Story of Two “Big Girls”**

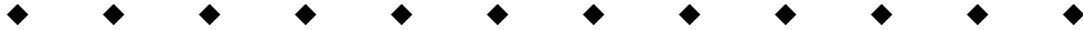
At one time or another every biographer has heard those dreaded words, “But I’ve never heard of that person.” Well, isn’t that the point? Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason led lives that mattered. Their story is a fascinating one. . . . [O]nce you meet Nan and Wilna you’ll never forget them. Bravo! —Robert S. Birchard, author of Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood and editor of the AFI Catalog of Feature Films

Through deft and engrossing storytelling, Joseph Eckhardt explores the exceptional lives of two independent women who were boldly defiant of societal restrictions.
—**Ray Murray**, President, TLA Entertainment Group; founder and artistic director, Philadelphia QFest; and author of *Images in the Dark: An Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Film and Video*

Woodstock, New York—June 15, 2015—*Living Large: Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason* by noted silent film historian Joseph P. Eckhardt is by turns a rollicking dual biography and a sweet love story. Wilna Hervey, a six-foot-three-inch, three-hundred-pound heiress, won the role of “The Powerful Katrinka” in the Toonerville Trolley comedies of the early nineteen-twenties because of her impressive size. Her evocation of Katrinka was so successful that it became a permanent part of her identity. While filming on location in the Philadelphia suburbs, Wilna Hervey met Nan Mason, the surprisingly tall daughter of her Toonerville co-star, Dan Mason. Wilna and Nan became inseparable friends and ultimately, life partners.

When Wilna’s cinema work began to wane, she and Nan decided to pursue careers as artists in the famed artists’ colony at Woodstock, New York. As artists, the two evolved into accomplished and imaginative talents exploring a wide variety of genres over the course of their long careers. As a same-sex couple, living in one of the few American communities where they could comfortably be themselves, “the Big Girls,” as they were known locally, carved out extraordinary creative lives. Uninterested in defining themselves except as artists, they lived a free and joyous existence, fully participating in the life of their community. They hosted some of the wildest parties ever seen in the Catskills and used their legendary “full moon” soirées to raise money for such local causes as the Woodstock Library and the children’s health center. Along the way they befriended such notables as the film director, Frank Capra; photographer Edward Weston; portrait artist Eugene Speicher; the Whitney Museum’s Juliana Force; painters Henry Lee McFee, William Pachner and Charles Rosen; and legendary children’s book illustrators Maud and Miska Petersham.

Wilna and Nan’s fifty-nine year partnership was defined not only by the remarkable variety of things they accomplished—or were at least willing to attempt—but also by their steadfast devotion to living life for all it was worth. Never apart from the fall of 1923 until Wilna’s death in the spring of 1979, the two women inspired, encouraged, assisted, teased, protected, comforted, amused and loved each other with the same enthusiasm that they brought to bear in all aspects of their lives.



This biography serves as a companion volume to the retrospective celebration of Wilna Hervey at the Betzwood Silent Film Festival in Blue Bell, PA, on May 9, and for a Wilna Hervey and Nan Mason exhibition that opened at the Historical Society of Woodstock on June 12.

About the author

Joseph P. Eckhardt is an Emeritus Professor of History at Montgomery County Community College in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. He taught history and art history from 1968 until his retirement in 2007. *Living Large* was born of Eckhardt’s interest in the silent Toonerville Trolley comedies made at the Betzwood studio in the Philadelphia suburbs. While searching for more information about the Amazonian actress who played “The Powerful Katrinka,” he uncovered an offbeat romantic tale as good as any movie.

Eckhardt is the author of *The King of the Movies: Film Pioneer, Siegmund Lubin*, published in 1997 by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. He has also published several articles on the early film industry both in the US and Europe. Eckhardt’s film research led to the foundation of the Betzwood Film Archive at MCCC and he remains actively involved with the collections. His biography *So Bravely and So Well: The Life and Art of William T. Rego*, accompanied by an online catalogue raisonné, was published in 2011 by the James A. Michener Art Museum, and distributed by the University of Pennsylvania Press. Eckhardt is currently collaborating with independent TV producer Henry Nevison on a feature-length documentary film about Siegmund Lubin.

About WoodstockArts

WoodstockArts is a publishing, production and marketing company based in Woodstock, NY. As a publisher it specializes in books about the arts and artists of Woodstock.

More About *Living Large*

The 200-page book was printed in full color and includes 180 rare and vintage color and black-and-white images documenting Wilna Hervey’s and Nan Mason’s lives and works.

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