Lillian Moore was among the few intrepid, deeply dedicated, and now too-little remembered individuals who initiated the academic field of dance history. They excavated long-hidden data, put together the disparate and puzzling facts, and created webs of information and understanding upon which later dance historians have built, sometimes unaware of these very foundations and founders. A leader among these pioneers of dance history, Lillian Moore helped to develop methods, standards for research and writing, and interest in the riches of our dancing past through her numerous publications, her wide network of contacts, and her deep understanding, as a dancer and teacher, of the dance field.

Born in Virginia, Moore, in her youth, made New York City her home. She studied dance under George Balanchine, Alexandra Fedorova-Fokine, and Charles Weidman. Moore debuted as a dancer with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet at age 16. She also performed with Lincoln Kirstein’s American Ballet, toured the Pacific as a ballet soloist during and after World War II under USO auspices, and gave solo concerts that included her own choreography, as well as examples of historical dance works. She taught ballet at the New York High School for the Performing Arts and the Robert Joffrey American Ballet Center. Moore also served on the President’s Advisory Commission on the Arts and on the panel of the New York State Council on the Arts.

Her dance history publications began in 1929 with an essay on Fanny Elssler and continued until (and even beyond) her death, from cancer, at age 55. She published books, commentaries, articles both scholarly and popular, reviews, and reports, reaching readers across the nation and abroad through Dance Index, Dance Magazine, Dance News (N. Y.), the New York Herald Tribune, the Dancing Times (London), Ballet Annual (London), and Theatre Notebook (London), as well as the important dance-history monograph series, Dance Perspectives.

Moore’s interest in theatrical dance was wide-ranging, but she also focused her considerable investigative skills in a few areas of specialty: early American ballet, the Romantic ballet in Europe, and the Royal Danish Ballet. Her writing is elegant and inviting, presenting her impeccable research to readers in an entertaining narrative that flows easily while conveying the names, dates, places, and careful details that graced her essays. She was an avid and proficient researcher, so familiar with the great dance archives that she served briefly as interim director of the New York Public Library (NYPL) Dance Collection while its founding curator, Genevieve Oswald, was on leave in 1954. Because Moore’s home was in New York, she was in the Dance Collection almost daily, and had a particularly intimate knowledge of its holdings and acquisitions. Her own breathtaking research collection, including file after file of precious handwritten notes, is held at NYPL’s Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

Writing in an age before photocopying, faxes, and the internet, Moore was one of a small but determined cadre of researchers (Lincoln Kirstein, Marian Hannah Winter, Gladys Lasky, and Ivor Guest were others in this circle) who shared information, hand-copied notes for one another as they scoured libraries, and helped to hoist the dance history field aloft, stimulating the academic dance field, providing texts for students, and identifying many exciting and as yet insufficiently researched periods, people, places, and works that future dance historians might tackle. Such scholarly
organizations as the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) and Society of Dance History Scholars were founded long after her death but owe her a deep debt of gratitude for her groundbreaking work. In 1980, the CORD conference "American Culture, Society and Dance: A Conference in American Dance History" honored Moore’s legacy. If all dance-history writing were as fluid, graceful, and clear as Moore’s, our field might emerge from self-conscious jargon to the clear light of readability, and perhaps, even, a modicum of popularity.

Lynn Matluck Brooks founded the Dance Program at Franklin & Marshall College in 1984. She holds degrees from University of Wisconsin and Temple University. A Certified Movement Analyst and dance historian, she has held grants from the Fulbright/Hayes Commission, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Brooks wrote reviews for Dance Magazine, edited Dance Research Journal and Dance Chronicle, and is author of several books and many articles. Currently, she is a participant in the Philadelphia-based "thINKing Dance" project, writing, editing, and pondering dance and dance writing.