

Frances Brigham Johnson Obituary

1927 - 2024



Frances Brigham Johnson, age 96, died peacefully at home in Alexandria, VA, on January 27, 2024, surrounded by her children. Throughout her life, she maintained her Christian faith and good spirits. She loved her family.

Frances was born in Evanston, IL, daughter of Erwin Risley Brigham and Hortense Garthwaite Fish, fourth among five children. She was a Mayflower descendant. Her family moved to Williamsburg, VA, in the early 1930s, and then to Champagne, IL, during World War II, where she graduated from University High School in 1945.

After two semesters at William & Mary College, she moved to Connecticut College for Women, graduating in 1949 with a BA degree in Government. After graduate work at Syracuse Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, she moved to Washington in 1950 to join the Economic Cooperation Administration, administering the Marshall Plan, where she met her future husband.

Her work in the Marshall Plan and succeeding agencies over the next forty years included the Central Secretariat of the Administrator, Women in Development, Congressional Relations, and country desks for Turkey, Brazil, Afghanistan and Senegal, culminating as the first Private Sector Coordinator in the USAID Africa Bureau. Her work as the architect of the "Turn-Around Strategy" that revamped the U.S. aid program in Brazil from 1963-1968 was key to being named "Woman of the Year for Career Professional Achievement in Foreign Affairs" in 1973,

Raising a family of four children and helping citizens in developing countries prosper ("Food for All through Enterprise") were only two of her missions. Active in her community, she helped start a successful pre-school for disadvantaged children in Alexandria in 1984, organized a state-wide conference on Pre-School Education for Disadvantaged Children held at the U. of Virginia in Charlottesville. She also served on the boards of the Urban League of Northern Virginia and Research for Better Schools, a 5-state national research laboratory.

She loved to ski, swim and play tennis, and traveled extensively, bicycling in Europe in 1948, traveling for five months in seven Asian countries in 1954-55, followed later by trips to Israel, China (twice), Russia, Turkey, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Senegal, Mauritania and South Africa.

She is survived by her husband of 72 years, Gordon O.F. Johnson, three children, Gordon F.B. Johnson and Susan C.J. Gildersleeve, both of Alexandria, VA, and Brigham N. Johnson of Delray Beach, FL, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her youngest son, Christian, who died at Stanford University in 1982.

There will be a memorial service at Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill in Alexandria, on Sat. February 24, at 12 noon. In lieu of flowers, gifts in her memory may be made to The Child & Family Network Centers, 3700 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304. See: <https://cfnc-online.org/>

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