

NEWS from Bennington College

BENNINGTON, VERMONT



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BENNINGTON, Vt. Mrs. Elizabeth Jennings Franklin, a founder of Bennington College, died May 15 at her home in Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, New York.

Mrs. Franklin was among the signers of the College charter in 1925. She was named a member of the College's first Board of Trustees that year and, with the exception of one sabbatical year, was chairman of the board from 1941 until her retirement. Prior to 1941 she was chairman of a trustee building committee and served on a committee to study the use of psychiatric service.

Mrs. Franklin was honored by the college May 8, 1952, at a testimonial dinner at the Hotel St. Regis, New York, N.Y., shortly before her retirement as a trustee, in recognition of her 25 years of service on the board. Speakers included the first three presidents of the college: the late Dr. Robert Devore Leigh; Dr. Lewis Webster Jones, now president of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and Dr. Frederick Burkhardt, now head of the American Council of Learned Societies.

A year later, the honorary degree was presented to Mrs. Franklin at June commencement exercises, along with a citation. The commencement dinner that evening was especially in her honor.

Mrs. Franklin, despite retirement, remained active in raising funds for the college, including major contributions of her own, until her recent illness prevented further participation.

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Mrs. Franklin's support of Bennington became part of a family tradition. Most of the land on which the college now stands was once part of the farmstead which was her birthplace. Her father, Frederic B. Jennings, practiced law in New York City, but Mrs. Franklin spent much of her time in North Bennington until her marriage to George S. Franklin. Her mother donated 140 acres of the farmstead in 1930 as a site for the college; a tenant house, a large barn and two chicken houses on the tract were remodeled to be parts of the college's physical plant when it opened its doors in 1932, and are still in use.

The Jennings estate and the family mansion, which replaced Mrs. Franklin's birthplace, were purchased by the college for a nominal sum in 1939 and the mansion now houses the Music Department. An adjacent carriage barn, remodeled, is still the college's auditorium and contains an art gallery. One of Mrs. Franklin's most recent gifts to the college was her remaining interest in adjoining meadowland which increased the size of the campus by 60 acres.

The family connection with Bennington College continues. Mrs. Franklin's daughter, Mrs. John W. Nields, 10 Gracie Square, New York City, who was a member of the second graduating class at Bennington in 1937, is now a trustee. The college honors major donors, of \$1,000 or more annually, as Elizabeth J. Franklin Associates.

Mrs. Franklin once was quoted by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, author and then a trustee of the college, as saying of the campus, "That was my childhood home, you know. I haven't words to say how happy it makes me to see it used as it now is."

Among her other activities, Mrs. Franklin was a co-worker from 1943 to 1947 with the late John Foster Dulles on the Commission for a Just and Durable Peace of the National Council of Churches, and published a bi-monthly paper sponsored by the commission.

She was a member for many years of the board of managers of the Bellevue School of Nursing and for several years, chairman of the Social Service Auxiliary of Bellevue Hospital.

Mrs. Franklin also had been a member of the board of directors of the Long Island Biological Association at Cold Spring Harbor and chairman of the women's committee for the laboratory.

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