

Special Edition



# Elmhurst Area Branch News

Special Memorial Issue • March 7, 2022

## Mary Eleanor Wall Passes at 92

On February 21 our branch lost one of our oldest and most dedicated members, Mary Eleanor Wall.

In this Special Edition of the newsletter we will review some of her many accomplishments and the legacy she leaves behind, proving one person can make a difference!

- AAUW Elmhurst President
- AAUW Illinois President
- Elmhurst YMCA Board
- Elmhurst H.R. Council
- Chicago Lung Association
- United Methodist Foundation
- University of Chicago
- 1st United Methodist Church
- Jimmy Carter's Campaign
- Director of Christian Education
- School District 205 Task Force
- Elmhurst College Challenge
- COD Century Project
- Democratic Women's Caucus
- DuPage County Board
- ERA Campaign
- Forest Preserve Commissioner
- DuPage Reg. Planning Board
- DuPage Senior Citizens Council
- Senior Home Sharing Inc.
- Ill. Shared Housing Network
- DuPage Community Foundation
- Saraj Library Project

*Reprinted from the Elmhurst Independent*

## OBITUARY

### Mary Eleanor Kidder Wall (1930-2022)

*By Dee Longfellow  
For The Elmhurst Independent*



#### Early years

Long-time Elmhurst resident Mary Eleanor Kidder Wall passed away on Monday, Feb. 21 at the age of 92. She was born in Monroe, Mich., in 1930 to Ralph Wyman Kidder and Neva Springer Kidder.

She attended public schools in Florida where her father was a researcher in cattle breeding and nutrition on a research station in the Florida Everglades.

As a child she remembers belonging to the youth groups at the Methodist church. She played the piano and organ for Sunday school, and in high school played the piano for Rotary and Lions clubs where she heard politicians and community leaders speak every week.

Her father was a community leader and her mother and two aunts provided leadership for the church women's group and Woman's Club. Having been exposed to urgent social issues in her youth, Mary Eleanor worked in favor of social justice, women's and seniors' rights, and fairness in society for the whole of her life.

#### Career

Mary Eleanor received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Florida Southern College and a Master of Religious Education degree at Emory University.

While at Emory she met her future husband, James McKendree Wall.

In 1951 she was the Director of Christian Education, first at College Heights Methodist Church, Lakeland, Fla., and then at the First United Methodist Church in Decatur, Ga.

#### Young married life

In 1953 Mary Eleanor Kidder married James Wall in Belle Glade, Fla. They moved to Illinois in 1957, with their two young sons, David McKendree and Robert Kidder, where Jim continued post graduate studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

In 1959 they moved to Elmhurst where their third son, Richard James \

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was born. Jim became editor of *The Christian Advocate* and then editor and publisher of *The Christian Century* magazine for 27 years. He retired in 1999. Throughout their lives, Reverend James and Mary Eleanor Wall were to share some very exciting times.

### **Volunteer extraordinaire**

While her children were growing up, Mary Eleanor was an active volunteer in the community. She served on the steering committees for School District 205 Citizens Task Force, Elmhurst College Challenge, College of DuPage Century III Project, and the League of Women Voters of Illinois Juvenile Court Watching Project.

She was on the Elmhurst YMCA Board of Directors and Elmhurst Human Relations Council (1965-1970).

Mary Eleanor was a consultant on Public Policy for the Chicago Lung Association and served on their Clean Air Committee (1969-1982).

She still found time to be a Director of the United Methodist Foundation at the University of Chicago (1966-75) and on the Administrative Board (1967) at the Elmhurst First United Methodist Church, where she also sang in the Chancel Choir.

In 1971 Mary Eleanor founded and chaired the DuPage County Democratic Women's Caucus. She was elected in 1974 to the DuPage County Board as one of the first Democratic women ever to be seated on the board. That same year, her husband ran for Democratic state central committeeman in the same primary and won.

### **Involved in presidential elections**

Mary Eleanor and her husband, Jim, were active in the Jimmy Carter Presidential campaigns in 1975-76 and 1980.

Jim was Illinois Chairman for the Carter Campaign in the Primary 1976 and 1980. They were friends with the Carters and shared common interests.

Jimmy Carter was elected President of the United States of America in 1976. In 1977 Vice President Walter Mondale personally phoned Mary Eleanor in Elmhurst to tell her that President Carter had appointed her to serve on a nine-member Presidential Commission to select a new Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"While Carter was President he spent the night at our home on May 25, 1978, after speaking at a Democratic Cook County/City of Chicago dinner," Mary Eleanor said. "Carter flew to Springfield the next day to address the Illinois legislature. In the fall of 1979, the two of us spent the night with the Carters at the White House and went to the opera with them to see *Salome*. We slept in the Lincoln bedroom."

While Mary Eleanor was in Washington she took the opportunity, as president of the American Association of University Women-Illinois, to meet with President Carter's senior adviser on women's affairs to discuss the prospect of her home state ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment.

And it was quite an extraordinary and unforgettable community event in 1978 when the President of the United States of America slept at the Walls' residence (451 S. Kenilworth) right here in Elmhurst! In fact, it was one of the city's highlights of the decade, especially for the Elmhurst Police Department. Elmhurst officers proudly and efficiently assisted the United States Secret

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*Jim and Mary Eleanor in the early days.*



*Mary Eleanor and Jim, many years later.*

## **Remembering Mary Eleanor**

I first met Mary Eleanor Wall in the seventies when Betsy Aldred asked me if I would like to be involved in a political campaign. Though I had no idea what that meant, I agreed because Betsy could be very persuasive.

At the time only Republicans were serving on the DuPage County Board. So naturally Mary Eleanor took up the challenge of running as a Democrat.

What a learning experience the campaign turned out to be! I was fascinated as I watched Mary Eleanor and Jim put their formidable organizational skills into practice.

They set up the phone calls to voters, wrote countless articles, attended meetings both small and large, set up the door to door efforts.

I participated in small ways, thrilled by the process, in awe of the organizers. And of course Mary Eleanor became the first Democrat on the DuPage County Board.

*---Rosemarie Dressander*



*Mary Eleanor and Roe Dessander*

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Service in providing security and crowd control for the approximate five thousand Elmhurst residents who greeted President Carter.

In 1980 Mary Eleanor once again was appointed by President Carter as one of three public members on a 26-member federal Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.

### **Local involvement**

While serving as a DuPage County Board Member, Mary Eleanor was a Forest Preserve Commissioner (1974 -78). She also was a DuPage County Regional Planning Commissioner (1975-2000) and served as chairperson for 16 years (1980-96).

In 1989, Elmhurst Mayor Charles Garrigues appointed Mary Eleanor to the Mayor's Task Force on Senior Housing. At the time, both the city and the county faced many issues concerning senior citizens. As a direct result of Mary Eleanor's enterprising efforts with numerous people and organizations, the DuPage Senior Citizens Council had been established in 1975.

Eventually a new not-for-profit group called Senior Home Sharing, Inc. was started in 1981. After serving on the Board, Mary Eleanor became the Executive Director in 1983 and continued in that position until she retired in May 2000.

She also assisted in forming the Illinois Shared Housing Network in 1993 with support from the Illinois Department on Aging. She has been graciously referred to as the "Godmother" of DuPage senior citizens.

In addition to consulting and serving on many councils, committees and commissions, Mary Eleanor was the founding force behind the DuPage Community Foundation in 1987. This nonprofit organization accepts bequests and donations, and in return awards monetary grants to deserving arts, civic, and social service groups in the county.

### **AAUW Leadership**

In 1966 Mary Eleanor Wall was the most dedicated and admired president of the Elmhurst Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW). It was quite clear from the beginning that she would go on to great achievements within the organization.

She served on several steering committees and chaired councils and commissions not only in Elmhurst but at the state level and nationally.

Mary Eleanor Wall became the Illinois State President in 1979. Under her expert and thoughtful leadership, issues like ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, childcare, job sharing and equal education for girls were studied. Strategies and action also were initiated.

As a representative of the Illinois AAUW, Mary Eleanor traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with legislators and to participate in discussions on the SALT II Treaty.

In 1998 she again was elected by the membership as co-president of the Elmhurst Branch. Her experience in the AAUW was significant in nurturing her interests and her development in her adult years and gave her the opportunity to establish lifelong friendships and work with outstanding women of all ages and many experiences.

Mary Eleanor Wall has been formally recognized by the Elmhurst Branch of the American Association of University Women as an AAUW

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## **AAUW Connection**

I take credit for introducing Mary Eleanor to AAUW. In the early 1960's, my husband Bob and I lived at 609 Chatham in Elmhurst with our 2 daughters who were 2 and 4 years old.

Mary Eleanor and Jim Wall became our backyard neighbors. Their boys were also 2 and 4 years old. The children played together and the parents became friends.

I invited Mary Eleanor to an AAUW meeting that year and soon afterwards she joined our branch. On that germination, she participated and contributed for 62 years to our AAUW branch, Illinois AAUW, and at the national level. We remained friends for 62 years.

*--Marcia Goltermann*



*Vivian Michaelis, Marcia Golterman and Mary Eleanor celebrating 50 years as AAUW members.*

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Educational Foundation Named Grant Honoree

In 1988 she was honored with the YWCA DuPage Outstanding Woman Leader Professional in Community Work Award.

Senior Home Sharing, Inc. presented her with the 2000 Merritt H Grim Award for her able leadership and many years of advocacy and outstanding service on behalf of seniors. In appreciation of her extraordinary efforts, she was given the 2000 Gold L.E.A.F. Award (Leadership and Excellence in Advocating for Families) by Metropolitan Family Services, DuPage.

Mary Eleanor continued to facilitate organizational development through volunteer work with not-for-profit and public policy work. She was elected co-president of the National Shared Housing Resource Center Conference.

### **Honored by DuPage Foundation**

In Feb. of 2020, when Mrs. Wall turned 90, David McGowan and Michael Sitrick of the DuPage Foundation came to her residence at Park Place to honor her birthday and recognize her contributions to the Foundation, which she helped develop from the beginning. The highlight of the day was when McGowan and Sitrick presented a book made especially for her, showcasing her years with the Foundation from its inception when she was at the helm. Needless to say, she was delighted.

“Mary Eleanor was a force for collaboration and community impact throughout her many years of service to our county,” said McGowan, DuPage Foundation president and CEO. “The foresight that she and our other co-founders, the late Brooks McCormick and Jerry Bradshaw, had to create an enduring institution wholly focused on raising the quality of life throughout DuPage County is a testament to their wisdom and shared vision. Her early efforts established a culture that has endured and has been a cornerstone of our becoming DuPage County’s philanthropic leader.”

### **Seraj libraries in Palestine earn place in her heart**

One of the efforts near and dear to Mary Eleanor’s heart was the Seraj Library Fund, which raises money to building libraries in Palestine. There is a James and Mary Eleanor Wall Library fund which was started just for that purpose. The Seraj Library in Jiftlek in the Jordan River Valley was established through their financial contributions.

“This was a love of both our parents and Mom was equally invested as Dad was in that mission,” said son David. “It was truly a joint venture for them.”

Mary Eleanor was interested in the archeology of the land of Palestine and traveled there to see some “digs.” After making a connection with Estephan Salameh, the Walls considered him one of their children and welcomed him into their home when he visited from Palestine, David said. When Estephan married his wife Laurie, an Elmhurst resident whose father had once been Chief of Police, the Walls stood in as his parents, when his own were unable to attend the ceremony in the U.S.

### **Self-reflection**

Mary Eleanor Wall said this about herself: “I am loyal, persistent, unpredictable, interested in history, prehistoric early humankind... I am also keenly interested in current events . . . as contemporary history unfolds.

“The foundation of this interest comes from being a liberal Protestant

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## Reaching Out

Mary Eleanor was my dear friend, a mentor and a constant source of encouragement. She never gave up her goals for moving the world to a better place for all, one where mutual respect would reign a priority.

I had the pleasure to serve on the Illinois AAUW State Board of Directors with her. We traveled together to national and state meetings and conventions which provided time for hours of discussion.

She was always about making AAUW a place for study and inquiry, a place for women to be heard and to gain courage to take personal action.

Her journey to end of life in this world was challenging. Our last time together in the midst of her exhaustion she still had words for me, even though I could no longer understand them---I will always imagine what she had to say.

Peace be with you my friend. Your work is finished however the results will live on.

Janet Hodge



*Janet Hodge and Mary Eleanor, longtime friends and stalwart supporters of AAUW.*

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Christian woman which brings me to being a feminist and a Democrat concerned about human rights and justice for all people and especially for the most vulnerable persons, often girls and older women ...

“I am always thinking, processing information and experiences, making connections to solve problems ... All of these experiences are now somehow integrated and connected in who I am at the present moment, still forming, processing and learning.”

She enjoyed archaeological study tours in the Near East and the Mediterranean, choral singing, opera and reading related to Biblical and classical archaeology. And of course, she was always there for her family.

### About the family

“As her eldest son, I missed living with her when she returned to work, that occurred when Richard was in high school,” David said. “But one thing I am certain of — her faith, belief in fairness and Methodist upbringing left me with the internal drive that service to others is the rent we pay for living on this Earth. I can attribute that to her.”

The Wall family included three sons four grandchildren and now, six great-grandchildren.

“There were two great grandkids born just a week apart in early November,” David said.

Beloved mother of David McKendree (Robin) Wall, Robert Kidder (Rena) Wall, and Richard James Wall; loving grandmother of Rachel Michelle (Jesse) Welliver, Adam McKendree (Kimmie) Wall, Melissa Grace Wall, and Mariah (Carlen) Cyphers; cherished great-grandmother of Norah Ruth Welliver, Lydia Noelle Welliver, Clara Eden Welliver, Tessa Joanna Welliver, Chance McKendree Wall, and Luca James Wall; dear sister of the late Clarence Kidder and the late Dorothy Overbey.

Memorial contributions in Mary Eleanor’s name may be made to Seraj Library Project, <https://www.serajlibraries.org/> 636 N. Harvey Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302; First United Methodist Church of Elmhurst, <https://umcelmhurst.org> 232 S. York Road, Elmhurst, IL 60126; or to the DuPage Foundation, <https://dupagefoundation.org/donate.html> 3000 Woodcreek Drive #310, Downers Grove, IL 60515-5408.



AAUW Friends Jennifer Jordan, Deb Markello and Marca Lagerwey.



*Leading the fight for ERA.*

## *The Extra Mile*

When I first met Mary Eleanor in 1966 it was obvious that she was passionate about AAUW.

At the time I was newly married, had just moved to Elmhurst, and knew no one other than co-workers at Conrad Fischer School, where I taught first grade.

As a friendly gesture to a prospective new member, Mary Eleanor, who was President of the Branch, invited my husband Ray and me to the AAUW annual Holiday Dinner.

She and her husband Jim personally picked us up at our apartment and were our escorts for the evening.

With Mary Eleanor as my mentor and friend, I joined the Elmhurst Branch and have been a member ever since.

Genie Urick



*Mary Eleanor and Marilyn Thompson at a monthly AAUW meeting.*

