Annette Jenks

May 14, 2025

Annette Jenks, aged 92, the retired Head Librarian of the Williamstown Public Library in Massachusetts, died May 14, 2025, in Little Compton, RI, of ovarian cancer after a short illness. Up until her diagnosis she had been in the hospital only once in her life aside from giving birth and had never even taken a long-term prescription medication. Life is full of surprises, some shocking.

Annette was born in Williamstown, Massachusetts, on February 11, 1933, the fourth generation of her family to live there. Her great-grandfather, a locomotive engineer on the Boston and Maine railroad, had settled there when the rail line through Williamstown and on to New York was finally completed. He had moved his family westward as it was being built. Two more generations after hers would be born in Williamstown.

Of all her life experiences, Annette’s marriage was to her the most important. Annette first met Ransom, truly the love of her life, when he entered her school and her homeroom in 7th grade. He lived with his grandparents on a hardscrabble farm in Hancock, south of Williamstown; he had moved to be with them after his parents divorced.

Upon graduating from high school, Ransom joined the Air Force and went to England, and Annette stayed behind to attend Green Mountain Junior College. Before graduating from college she had sewn her own wedding

dress, and upon graduating she hopped on the first available plane, flew to England, and married Ransom at the Register Office. They would remain happily married for just a few days shy of 70 years and, although they had to work hard and be resourceful, would never truly want.

Life back in the States was initially difficult; good jobs were hard to come by in small, rural towns. Annette worked part-time in the town library until she had her two daughters, Julie and Laurie. When her children were a little older, she returned to work at the library.

When the head librarian resigned, Annette was offered the job, which she did with enthusiasm, diligence, and skill. When the Massachusetts Library Association learned that she only had an associate degree, it required that she obtain a bachelor's. She found Skidmore College's University Without Walls and enrolled, completing her bachelor's degree. She never had an M.S. in library science, which probably nowadays would have ruled her out as a candidate, but she nonetheless would be a superb librarian.

In the library there was no area dedicated to children; their books were only available in the stacks. She persuaded the town to build a children's room that was more inviting and could host a reading group. She studied resources like The New York Times Book Review to find the most interesting and well-written new books to acquire for the library, and she was, of course, also open to suggestions; she knew books like those extolled by the Times were not for everyone. She grew the library's circulation substantially and added services like lending films, subscribing to newspapers, book discussion groups, a regional bookmobile, and an outreach tape lending program for the hospital and nursing homes. She culled obsolete books. She rejoiced in helping people get pleasure not only from borrowing and reading books but also from their knowing it was all free. Thinking ahead, she helped the library become one of the first in western Massachusetts to computerize in order to fully utilize

the library's resources. She eventually became president of the Western Massachusetts Library Association.

As she was dying, she learned by chance about how receiving help had transformed one person's life and said, "That is why I wanted a life of service. You can make such a difference in people's lives."

During this period Annette also participated in the life of the town in other ways. She was the head of the PTA at Broad Brook School, a board member of Pine Cobble School, and an incorporator of the Williamstown Savings Bank.

Nearing retirement, Annette and Ransom decided to leave Williamstown, move to the nearby town of Shaftsbury, VT, and build their dream home. Their new home was lovely and in a beautiful place, on the side of West Mountain, with views across the valley, room for vegetable and flower gardens, and surrounded by acres of woods filled with native plants, among them many pink lady's slippers, a rare treasure. Although she had had lovely flower gardens in Williamstown, Annette gardened even more passionately. Her garden was the first one outside Bennington itself to be put on a garden tour of the Bennington Garden Club. She and Ransom hosted a fun-filled summer camp for their two grandchildren every year, full of numerous outdoor and indoor activities, some for both of them together, some tailored for each individually.

She became very active in the House of Local History in Williamstown, arranging its house tours, researching the detailed histories both of the houses and of their owners. In collaboration with one other person, she created a database of every burial site in Williamstown's historic Eastlawn Cemetery. She became a member of the Shaftsbury Historical Society. She helped the town of Shaftsbury organize their deed books and put them on the

internet. She volunteered at the North Adams and Bennington libraries. She became intrigued by genealogy, doing her own research and as always being meticulous, evaluating the reliability of her sources and trying to corroborate her discoveries. She visited town halls to look at musty records, went to graveyards, and subscribed to Ancestry.com. Among her ancestors she found a link to one king of England!

Annette was a quiet, reticent, gentle, and unassuming person. Once people got to know her, they discovered she was friendly and very loyal, and she made lifelong relationships. She was bright, highly motivated, energetic, thorough, and conscientious. Annette was one of those people who do things in the background of our lives to make them more enjoyable and to enrich them, sometimes without our awareness.

Both she and Ransom were aging, of course, and Ransom was developing serious health issues, so they made yet another difficult and courageous decision, to sell their house, downsize, move to an entirely new area, and live in a retirement community in Glen Mills, PA, closer to one of their children, Julie, and to medical care. Once again they adapted and thrived. They headed the community gardens there. Annette continued to read and do genealogy. Ransom's health deteriorated, and he died in 2022, just a few weeks after his 90th birthday and a few days shy of their 70th wedding anniversary.

Soon her daughter, Julie, and son-in-law, Peter, decided that they were going to move to Little Compton, RI to be near their only child, Ben. With some concern and hesitation about how she would react, they told Annette about their plans and asked if she would like to join them. To their surprise she unhesitatingly, even eagerly, accepted their invitation. As so often in her life, given the chance, she seized it. She took to her new home, an apartment over the garage of Julie and Peter's 200 year-old farmhouse. She loved being back

in New England in a small town in the country, having a chance to garden, being close to family, and having her first great-grandchild. She was awestruck by the natural world around her. She began to bake again after having abandoned doing so for several years. She read voraciously. She had exacting standards for books, and could recognize when one was well-written, had a good plot and characters, and was not gratuitously complex. She said it was the best year of her life and that she truly felt blessed. She had no more major decisions to make, no significant stressors, and at last no financial worries.

Then, of course, came her diagnosis of metastatic ovarian cancer. She was very brave in trying to understand and confront her illness. She did not become resentful or depressed; she felt she had had a good life and had to die at some point. She continued to live her life to its fullest, gardening for a time, reading avidly, even still doing some baking, and seeing her family and keeping in touch with friends and relatives. She enjoyed visits with her new great-granddaughter. She remained happy and content up until the day she died.

Annette is survived by her older daughter, Julie Zorach, of Little Compton, RI; Julie's husband, Peter; her grandson, Ben, of Padanaram, MA; her granddaughter-in-law, Sarah; her great-granddaughter, Leora; her younger daughter, Laurie Raimondi, of Seneca, SC; her son-in-law, Bill; her granddaughter, Kristin Dober, of Irondale, AL; and her grandson-in-law, Brian Dober.

Donations in Annette's honor should be made to the kind of places that meant the most to her, your local library or historical society.