



Mildred Merrick

MAY 15, 1921 - FEB 24, 2014



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Mildred Merrick

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Merrick widow and UM reference librarian Mildred Merrick dies at 92

By Howard Cohen

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Mildred Merrick

Courtesy Arva Moore Parks

Mildred Merrick

Long before Google made fact-finding a click away, Mildred Merrick was a one-stop source of information for countless students at the University of Miami.

Merrick, 92, the last, by marriage, of the original Merrick family that founded Coral Gables, died Feb. 24. She moved to Miami in 1954 with her first husband, the late Carl Selle, a UM English professor, and five years later became an acquisition librarian at the school. There, she helped acquire some of the Otto G. Richter Library's most important early collections, friend and historian Arva Moore Parks said. She became the reference librarian in 1976, a position she held until her retirement in 1991.

Google? Back then that was the sound a baby made. UM had Merrick, and students and staff would find her working in one of the campus' old wooden buildings, fondly called the shacks, until she helped open the permanent library in 1962.

"She really loved reference work," said friend Martha Hubbert, who began working with Merrick at the library in 1964, where a lifelong friendship blossomed. "There's a certain kind of heady sense of power to doing reference work and having the feeling that any question that occurs to you, you know what book to go to. These days it's easier with Google, but she knew where to go, right to it."



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That passion for text, for knowledge, began at a young age after her 1921 birth in Michigan to Frank and Jenny Heath, remembers younger sister Dolores LaFayette.

“She prided herself — or studied — so she could fit in with the conversations of my father and grandfather when she was just young. She didn’t just pass off information haphazardly. It was checked through before she would tell you something, so it was pretty accurate,” LaFayette said

“When I was born our mother had a stroke shortly after, and she, and our older sister, were taught to bathe me and take care of me, along with my mother’s help, of course. She feels that is when she became mature,” LaFayette said from her home in Seattle. “She was almost 13 when I was born, and my older sister was almost 16. I’ve always bonded with her, and she with me, I think, for that reason.”

After Selle’s death, she married art professor Richard Merrick, youngest brother of George Merrick, the founder of Coral Gables nearly 90 years ago. The couple worked alongside George Merrick’s widow, Eunice Peacock Merrick, to preserve important Merrick papers that are housed in the Special Collections section of UM’s library.

Mildred Merrick and Eunice bonded. Touched by her kindness, Eunice left Merrick some money in her will that she used to build onto the Coconut Grove property that would be her home for the rest of her life, Hubbert said.

Here, Merrick, who also loved art history and cooking, helped preserve the records of the Coconut Grove Woman’s Club, founded in 1891, and facilitated a donation of its books and logs to the university library’s Special Collections section. She also ran a Christmas Day event at the club for people who were alone for the holidays.

“She was an amazing woman,” added Parks. “We became friends more than a decade ago when she shared some George Merrick material with me. With her support, I have been working on a George Merrick biography which I just finished — all 450 pages. She has been a true collaborator and mentor.”

In addition to her sister, Merrick is survived by her brother James Heath.



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A memorial service will be held at the Coral Gables Merrick House, 907 Coral Way, at 2 p.m. March 16. Donations may be made to The Merrick Collection, Special Collections, University of Miami Library or the University of Miami Archives, 1300 Memorial Dr., Coral Gables, Fl., 33146.

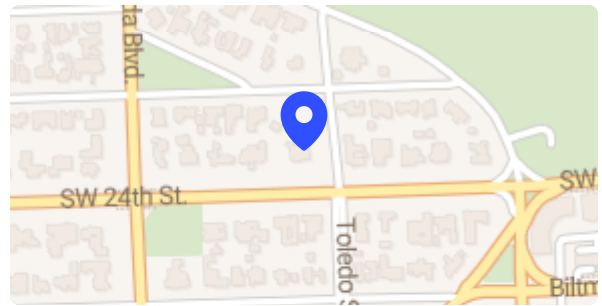


Events

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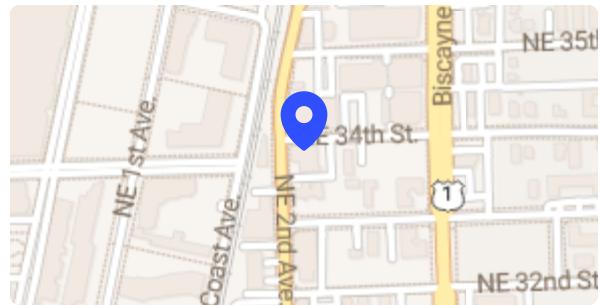
Memorial Service

- Sunday**, March 16, 2014
- 2:00 PM ET
- Merrick House**
907 Coral Way, Coral Gables FL 33134



Cemetery Details

- Van Orsdel Crematory**
3333 NE 2nd Avenue, Miami FL 33137





Memories only last if you share them

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