



# Marlene "Marly" Merrill

NOV 7, 2024



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# Marlene "Marly" Merrill

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## M arlene "Marly" Merrill Obituary

Marlene "Marly" Merrill, longtime resident of Oberlin, passed away peacefully November 7, 2024 after an extended illness.

Marly was born in South Bend, Indiana, in 1933, the only child of Orlo and Jessie Deahl who instilled in her the love of adventure, nature, books, and music. She graduated from Central High School in 1951 and continued her education at Vassar College, where she graduated as a child study major in 1955. In 1956, she married Dan Merrill and moved to Minneapolis, where he finished a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Minnesota and where their son Steve was born. After a brief stint in Galesburg, Illinois, they arrived in Oberlin, Ohio in 1962. Their daughter Karen was born the next year.

Over more than six decades in Oberlin, Marly's life took several notable turns. She taught elementary school until 1975, including at Eastwood School and in the first Head Start Program in Lorain County. She served as the program's director in 1968-1969. In the mid-1970s, Marly began volunteering in the Oberlin College Archives and took classes in Women's Studies and American Studies. What followed was a remarkable career as a historian, documentary editor, and independent author. Acutely aware of social injustices, Marly focused on the lives of Black women at Oberlin College before the Civil War, and in 1977 she founded, with Ellen N. Lawson, the Oberlin College Antebellum Black Coed Project. Marly's first series of publications emerged from this project.

In the 1980s, she set off on her own to research and write about early radical women at Oberlin College. She also began collaborating with history professor, Carol Lasser, on a project to uncover the lives of – and friendship between – Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, who attended Oberlin in the mid-1840s and became leaders in fighting for women's rights and the abolition of slavery. This collaboration culminated in the publication of *Friends and Sisters: Letters Between Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 1846-93*. Marly followed this with



## Obituary

**Marlene "Marly" Merrill**

Growing Up in Boston's Gilded Age: The Diary of Alice Stone Blackwell, 1872-74, published by Yale University Press.

Although Marly was never employed by Oberlin College, she left her mark on the institution. She helped found the Oberlin College Affiliate Scholar Program, which provided resources and collaborative opportunities for independent scholars, and volunteered hundreds of hours on college committees. Her reach extended beyond the college, as she brought her historical expertise to the work of the Oberlin Oral History Project, the Oberlin Historic Preservation Committee, and the Oberlin Heritage Center.

In 1987, Marly and Dan began spending their summers in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where they hosted scores of friends and family over nearly thirty years. Perhaps most at home at the foot of the Tetons, Marly turned her scholarly attention westward, discovering Oberlin connections in the first U.S. government survey of Yellowstone in 1871. The result was three more books published between 1999 and 2012, the last of which was a collaborative effort with Dan.

Marly wore her accomplishments lightly. Family and friends remember her graciousness and kindness, lively conversation, and her deep empathy. Among the many things she loved were birdwatching with Oberlin friends, attending concerts with Dan, reading and talking about good books, and sharing her beloved Tetons with people near and far. In the years following Dan's death in 2016, Marly had a loving partnership with Griff Dye, whose wit and compassion enriched their days together.

Marly is survived by her partner Griff Dye; son Steve and daughter-in-law Nancy Day Merrill, and their children Annabelle and Jessie Mei; her daughter Karen and her former partner, Martha Umphrey, and their sons Theo and Dash; her sister-in-law Cynthia Tamny and brother-in-law Michael Tamny, as well as nieces, nephews, and cousins.

She was preceded in death by her husband Dan and her parents.

Her family wishes to extend their deepest gratitude to everyone at Kendal at Home, Kendal at Oberlin, and Hospice of the Western Reserve who supported and loved Marly through the last, challenging stretch of her life.

A memorial service will be planned.



## Obituary

**Marlene "Marly" Merrill**

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In lieu of flowers, donations in Marly's memory can be made to the Oberlin Heritage Center, PO Box 0455, Oberlin, Ohio 44074.

To send flowers  
to the family or plant a tree  
in memory of Marlene "Marly" Merrill, please visit our floral store.

[Read More](#)



## Tribute Wall

## Marlene "Marly" Merrill

AM

**A Memorial Tree Was Planted For Marlene "Marly" Merrill** posted:

A Memorial Tree was planted for Marlene "Marly" Merrill We are deeply sorry for your loss ~ the staff at Dicken Funeral Home & Cremation Service Join in honoring their life - plant a memorial tree

April 22 at 8:57 AM

KH

**Kristen Hubert** posted:

Dear Karen and Steve, What a treasure your mom was. I often took care her dogs when I was in Oberlin. She was always so generous, loving and kind to me. I always looked forward to spending time with her. And I feel like I got to know you both a bit through her. She was often headed to see one of you and I would come and take care of Bridger, Nette, later Oliver and Brooks. I loved hearing about her adventures over coffee when she got back. She was a gift to all of us.

December 9 at 6:21 PM

LG

**Linda Gates** posted:

How we cherish our memories of Marly. A warmer, more gracious person never walked the earth. I first met Marly when we were both teaching at Lake Ridge Academy. John had just started as an elementary teacher at Eastwood and asked Marly for counsel. In her quiet, generous way, she gave him a book, Time for Poetry, a poetry collection compiled by May Hill Arbuthnot, which stood him in good stead for many years. Every day, he wrote one of the poems from this book on the blackboard and used it in his teaching. We cherish this book along with every encounter we had with Marly.

December 5 at 5:01 AM

HL

**Heidi Leeds** posted:

Dear Merrill Family, We send our sincere condolences to you from Jackson Hole. Both Marly and Dan were the very best neighbors and we have missed them ever since they moved to Oberlin full time. We adored their cheery intelligence and we always walked away from a conversation with them having learned something new about the history of the area. Marly was a dear and we know her absence will be felt from here to Ohio and beyond. With heavy hearts, The Leeds Family

November 26 at 1:56 PM



## Tribute Wall

**Marlene "Marly" Merrill**

DB

**Deanna Bates** posted:

Dear Karen, Steve and Griff, My husband and I have so many wonderful memories of Marly. As my dad's (Albert Deahl, Jr) cousin, they were each raised as only children. They both told me of the more brother-sister bond they shared. We enjoyed when Marly and Dan would visit. After my dad died, we continued visiting (often with our daughter) to their beautiful Jackson Hole home when our summer travels took us that way. We had many wonderful times discussing life and philosophy! Marly was much loved and admired by our family. She will be truly missed. Love to you all, Deanna (Deahl) Bates

November 24 at 1:03 PM

MW

**Maryann Watson** posted:

To Stevie and Karen, My sincere condolences to you. I was in high school when I met your parents. I was your babysitter in the mid 60's. Your parents were very kind to me. (I'm now age 75).

November 16 at 2:51 PM

DC

**Debbie Cochrane** posted:

Such a lovely and soft spoken lady! It was always a pleasure to see her and Dan downtown as they were frequent visitors to our store Powers and Dawley in Oberlin. They are both in our thoughts and prayers and remembered fondly.

November 15 at 2:25 PM



## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Marlene by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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