



## Ellen Kay Compton

August 22, 1938 - March 19, 2020

Ellen Kay Compton, age 81, of Fayetteville passed away Thursday, March 19, 2020. She was born August 22, 1938 in Little Rock to Dr. Neil and Laurene Putman Compton.

When her father began his service as Navy physician in the South Pacific, Ellen moved to Bentonville, living with her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Surrounded by these women, she witnessed strength and resiliency and developed a thorough understanding of the importance of connectedness and sense of place.

After World War II concluded, Ellen would follow her father throughout the Ozarks as he collected and transplanted native species onto their property, Crystal Springs (now home to Crystal Bridges). Like her parents, she felt close to nature, enjoyed hiking, and was passionate about saving and maintaining the Buffalo River for future generations.

She attended the public schools of Bentonville, Arkansas, and received a B.A (1960) and Master's degree (1964) in history from the University of Arkansas. She was a member of Delta Delta Delta sorority where she made life-long friendships. During this time, she took on the first of many leadership roles as the president of Women's Student Association. For the next several years, Ellen immersed herself in the study and teaching of history, working on her PhD and teaching Western Civilization at the University. She then began her career as a process librarian with Fayetteville Public Schools.

In 1980, Ellen was employed by Special Collections in the University of Arkansas Libraries, where she remained for thirty years. She received a certificate in Archives Management from the US National Archives in Washington in 1982. Throughout the 1980s, she traveled the country as a field archivist, collecting materials for preservation in Special Collections. Among these was a major collection of records from women's clubs in the state with emphasis on Arkansas Home Demonstration Clubs. Her wide acquaintance with Arkansans far and wide was an invaluable asset in this work. This was also the case when she was appointed Major Gifts Development Officer during the project to expand Mullins Library.

In addition to her work-related travel, Ellen explored the world to learn more about her place in it, visiting sites throughout Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and Asia. She particularly enjoyed her trips to China under the expert guidance of Dr. Henry Tsai. To further their understanding of others, Ellen and her family acted as hosts for foreign

students attending the U of A, developing close, lasting friendships with many of them. All the while, Ellen maintained her connection to Arkansas. She continued to be active in the Ozark Society and was twice appointed by then Governor Bill Clinton to the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, serving from 1979-1996.

She was a member of the Washington County Historical Society and was editor of the WCHS journal Flashback from 1979-81. She served as president of the Arkansas Historical Association from 1986-1988.

Wanting to preserve the legacy of their grandmother and their parents, Ellen and her siblings sold their family home and grounds in Bentonville where it is now known as Compton Gardens and part of the Peel Compton Foundation.

In 2002, she began work on the extensive professional and personal papers of Fay Jones, prize-winning architect and a member of the faculty of the University's School of Architecture. She conceived and established the physical environment for an expanded Arkansas Architecture Archives. Ellen's career at the University culminated in 2009 with the Distinguished Service Award, recognizing her 30 years of outstanding contributions to the U of A.

After her retirement, Ellen and Charles Allison published Fayetteville (Images of America), a book of photos and descriptions detailing the history of the town, beginning with its founding in 1828.

In 2017, she received the Washington County Historical Society's Distinguished Citizen Award. In 2018, she was the recipient of the Arkansas Historical Association's Lifetime Achievement Award.

While it is easy to enumerate the many ways Ellen impacted Arkansas at large, it is more difficult to adequately describe her as a friend, grandmother, and mother. Meetings of the Modern Literature Club were occasions to celebrate friendships and deepen intellectual bonds. She enjoyed attending movies and art events with friends and family and enjoyed critiquing/debriefing those events even more. Yet, she continued to love Bob Dylan, regardless of the state of his vocals. And when she became Nanna Ellen, she sat on the floor, played games, colored, and watched episode after episode of Boss Baby with her youngest grandsons.

Fiercely independent, Ellen was also incredibly introspective and vulnerable. Her numerous journals give testament to the care she placed on relationships and to the ways she challenged herself to do more, to do better. Likewise, she challenged those around her to think critically and to question the status quo. Her home was filled with books of poetry, Arkansas history, award-winning fiction, and theology; she was continually reading and learning, underlining meaningful phrases and passages, making notes to herself for future reference on hundreds of library catalogue cards. While Ellen did not always suffer

fools gladly and her conversational pauses could stop hearts, her sharp wit and joie de vivre made every group more interesting. Yet, instead of being reactive, her insightful, intentional commentary was meant to bring out the best in each person she knew.

Ellen was preceded in death by her grandmother, Edna Swift Putman, her parents, and her brother, William David Compton. She is survived by two sons, David Shipley and his wife Jamie of Little Rock and Neil Shipley and his wife Sally of Fayetteville; her sister, Edra Ann Diaz and her husband Rene of Prairie Village, Kansas; a granddaughter, Sarah Ann Shipley; three grandsons, William Harrison Shipley, Benjamin Rhys Shipley and Braden Compton Shipley; two nephews, Armando Diaz and Spencer Compton; and countless friends and extended family members, including Ken Smith, Curtis and Jane Shipley, and her fellow parishioners at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville.

Cremation arrangements are under the direction of Moore's Chapel in Fayetteville. Given the restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a private interment will be held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Saturday, March 28th at 9:30 am. Please think of Ellen at that time. The family will host a celebration of Ellen's life later in the year and hope that her friends and extended family members will join us at that time.

Memorials are preferred to the Ozark Society, P.O. Box 2914, Little Rock, AR, 72203, [www.ozarksociety.net](http://www.ozarksociety.net); Compton Gardens, 312 N. Main St., Bentonville, AR 72712, [www.peelcompton.org](http://www.peelcompton.org); or St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 224 N. East Ave, Fayetteville, AR 72701, [www.stpaulsfay.org/give](http://www.stpaulsfay.org/give).

St. Paul's Episcopal will live stream the service on Saturday at 9:30 am. To watch the live stream, go to <https://www.youtube.com/c/stpaulsfay>. For those unable to watch live, a recording of the service will be available at the same web address shortly thereafter.

# Comments

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“ Ellen and I were colleagues and friends for more than thirty years, from our training as archivists through our work collecting and processing research materials for Arkansas studies. We went on collecting trips, attended meetings, and especially collaborated with many practicing and aspiring historians working in Special Collections at the U of A. Her brilliant social skills complemented her inquiring mind and wide-ranging knowledge. Her sincere personal interest in every person she met always astonished me. And her devotion to her many elderly friends, giving them her time and attention, truly inspired me.

Ethel Simpson

Ethel Simpson - April 05 at 12:35 AM

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“ I was so so sad when I learned of Ellen’s passing. And shocked. Somehow I thought she would live forever because her “life force” was so strong (a phrase I learned from her). She took me under her wing in 1980 when I joined the staff of Special Collections at the UA Library, not just as a professional mentor, but as a friend. I am eternally grateful to have known Ellen. We spent a lot of time together during the 4 years I was in Fayetteville and the generosity and kindness of Ellen and Curtis, as well as the pleasure of their company, made those years happy, even as my husband and I struggled through near-poverty in married-student housing. (Strange to say, we now have fond memories of Carson-Terrace.) I got too absorbed in my own pursuits in DC and now Miami to keep close contact, but I thought of Ellen often, always loved her, and still do. My deepest condolences to all the Shipley family. God bless you all, and it is terrible you have to absorb this loss during such a dreadful time. Please let me know about a memorial service. Love, Nan Thompson Ernst  
nernst97@gmail.com

Nan Ernst - April 04 at 02:50 PM

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“ Floor Plant for Sympathy was purchased for the family of Ellen Kay Compton.



March 31 at 09:55 AM

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“ Ellen is one day older than I am and we shared many birthday parties together both preschool and during school and after we return home in 2000. I count her as one of my dearest life long friends. May God hold her in the palm of his hand. Dorothy Shemwell

Dorothy Shemwell - March 28 at 12:15 PM

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“ I was so sorry to hear of Ellen's passing. I first met her father and hiked with him and was privileged to take him to a place that he didn't know how to access. I related the story to Ellen about that hike later. I enjoyed being with Ellen on some hikes and as members of the Ozark Society. got to know her really well on a China trip. We also shared a few trips to look for the elusive Ivory billed woodpecker. Ellen will be missed for all she did to preserve history for generations to come.

Betty Brown

Betty brown - March 28 at 10:18 AM

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“ Ellen and I met almost fifty years ago as UofA students in a small graduate seminar. I was struck by her brilliant way with words and her ease of getting to know others. We became fast friends, and I will always treasure our relationship. Her valuable work in a variety of areas has made Ellen Compton immortal.

I know that God is holding Ellen and the Compton family in the palm of His hand. But I will still miss her more than I can say.

Teresa Luneau - March 27 at 10:15 PM

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“ We never knew her, but your mother sounds like an amazing women. Our thoughts are with you.

Pete & Mary

Pete Savin - March 27 at 08:00 PM

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“ To Ellen's family, I am sorry for your loss of Ellen. She was a remarkable lady. I was honored and fortunate to serve with Ellen on the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission for nine years from the mid 1980's to the mid 1990's. We attending meetings bi monthly during those years and struck up a wonderful friendship. Ellen

was so kind, intelligent, personable, compassionate, and passionate about whatever she invested her time in. We who knew Ellen will also miss her grace and smile, You all have been in my thoughts and prayers. May your faith and fond memories of Ellen sustain you all in this difficult time. Again, I am so sorry.

Ralph Wilson, Jr.  
Osceola

Ralph Wilson, Jr. - March 26 at 02:47 PM

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“ I was fortunate to have met Ellen years ago when she was the archivist in the architectural collection in UA Special Collections. I got to know her sense of humor and her depth of knowledge of Arkansas history when I drove with her to a conference in Fort Worth. She was a font of stories about every town we drove through. I ran into her recently when shopping. She was out there independently taking care of groceries and herself, looking really quite well and talking about her plans for the evening. I will miss her.

Kim Sexton - March 26 at 11:23 AM

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“ This makes me very sad.... I met Ellen when I worked as her assistant at the UA library in Special Collections organizing the E. Fay Jones Collection. She was kind, smart and funny! She loved the special shoes I brought her from Colombia... I'm very sad and I wish I would have keep in touch with her more. My condolences to all her family and friends...

Natalia Pizarro - March 26 at 10:03 AM

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“ I'm so saddened to hear of Ellen's passing. We've learned a lot from her about our area's vivid history and shared her love of the Buffalo and the importance of walking softly in nature. My sister and I had great fun floating the Buffalo River with Ellen. We will miss your kind spirit Ellen May God bless and keep your family. Rest In Peace sweet Lady!! Betty Sharp

Betty Sharp - March 26 at 08:28 AM

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“ My memories of Ellen are with the Ozark Society----I was new with the group and she would walk with me and taught me about the Nuttall Tree, Serviceberry Tree, and many wildflowers. Ellen had the most beautiful smile and beautiful skin. She was quick witted and gentle of spirit.  
When she did not hike anymore I would see her out and about...giving talks,

meetings etc and she was always ready with a smile and a quick chat....  
A very special lady!

**Pat McKeown** - March 26 at 08:19 AM

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“ ...a life well lived, what a legacy Ellen leaves behind to inspire others

**Diane Breazeale** - March 26 at 02:37 AM

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“ Ellen was a talented and accomplished woman. Hers was a meaningful life.  
Condolences to her family. Carole Lynn Sherman

**Carole L. Sherman** - March 25 at 09:53 PM

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“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



**Sonia Tsai** - March 25 at 09:24 PM

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“ Although I didn't see her often--too many miles--we could always pick our friendship right up, as if we'd been together the day before. She introduced me to the Buffalo River, Bob Dylan, and Judith Viorst. Many middle of the night conversations about life and the world, books, films. .She's left a hole in my heart--and in the fabric of life. So glad she discovered St Paul's Episcopal Church--  
Condolences to her family and friends.

**Judy Hefley McFadden** - March 25 at 04:20 PM

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“ I am sorry to hear of Ellen's death, and so enjoyed learning more of her legacy. She joined St phoebe's altar guild at St. Paul's about 4 years ago and true to her nature she immersed herself in the traditions and symbolism surrounding our services. I can picture her now leaning on the counter near our piscina after 11:00 services doing clean up duty! Two fellow members texted me this week to ask if it was "our Ellen" who had died; that is what she will be to me!

She was such a caring friend to all. One Saturday morning when we had gathered to set up for Sunday services, she handed me 2 index cards that she had come across during her morning reflections. These were from 2 research publications that my husband had written years before his death. She had made a connection that I so appreciated!

May God comfort your family at this time.

Sincerely, Helen Brown

**helen brown** - March 25 at 03:38 PM



“ I will always miss Ellen, dear friend and counselor of many years. Always thoughtful , kind and realistic; a gentle soul. It was delightful fun to be with Ellen and her Dad, Neil on canoeing and hiking trips. Neil loved to burst into song. Ellen would roll her eyes in jest but everyone enjoyed his unique style and “Ozark songs” and Joined in. Ellen truly lived a richly productive, grace-filled life. She was and is a gift to Arkansas and beyond. My heartfelt and shared sadness for Ellen’s family. May you be blessed with memories and peace. Farewell dear Ellen until we can all gather again on the Buffalo and in the woods.

Alice Andrews

**Alice B. Andrews, LittleRock** - March 27 at 02:34 PM



“ I was a pledge at the University of Arkansas when Ellen was our mentor and a Senior at the Delta Delta Delta sorority house. She was someone we all looked up to and admired by all of us. She was not only smart but fun and nice to us. We adored her. After reading her OB I am not surprised at all her lifetime accomplishments both professionally and personally. Everyone looked up to her. Me too. Today I will look UP and remember the good times w her. God bless Ellen and all who were so fortunate to know and love her.  
Signed: Cookie Cain, Tri Delta from Ft Smith; now Overland Park, Kansas  
(cookie/Carolyn CAin Hanson)

**carolyn hanson** - March 25 at 11:43 AM



“ Ellen has been part of my life since childhood. Best friends with my cousins. Her mother and my mother were friends. We were sorority sisters and members of the same church parish. Ellen never retreated from telling me just what she thought about things, and I depended on her good sense. I will miss her.....

**Carolyn Banks** - March 25 at 10:50 AM



“ She was always so kind. Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring--she will be missed.

**Necia** - March 25 at 09:13 AM