

Maybell Renfrew Peck Obituary

Heaven welcomed Maybell Renfrew Peck on Friday, Jan. 30, 2015.

Maybell Elizabeth Renfrew was born in St. Johnsbury on Dec. 7, 1918, to Roscoe and Reita (Donaghy) Renfrew. She and her identical twin sister Isabell were the second youngest of six siblings.

Maybell grew up in the St. Johnsbury neighborhood then called Summerville, where her father Roscoe owned the R. A. Renfrew Store at the corner of Portland Street and Concord Avenue. She attended Portland Street School and St. Johnsbury Academy, and as a teenager joined her brothers and sisters helping out at her father's store.

Maybell was blessed to find love twice in her lifetime. In 1941 she was married to George William Conly, a much-decorated Army Air Corps navigator, who was killed in action in 1945. In 1947 she was remarried to Stanley Peck of Sheffield, who passed away in 1978. Her last years were spent happily at Canterbury Inn in St. Johnsbury.

After graduating from St. Johnsbury Academy in 1936, she went on to earn her teaching degree at Plymouth (N.H.) Teacher's College. She worked in York Beach, Maine, during the summers of her college years. A practice teaching stint in Dalton, N.H., provided early proof of what a thoughtful, exceptional teacher she would become. She shared that as a new teacher she was intimidated by the size and roughness of some of the boys but quickly found that, like all kids, they responded to someone who really cared about them. This was a learning she took with her into every classroom.

She taught at Orleans High School and Lyndon Institute, operated a nursery school in her house on Clayton Street and worked for the St. Johnsbury Chamber of Commerce. She served on the St. Johnsbury School Board, including a term as President. During the 1950s she was active in parent



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teacher associations and organized several local variety shows (known back then as "minstrel shows"), which were very popular. "The hidden talents of our neighbors were an amazing surprise to everyone," she said.

Maybell joined St. Johnsbury Academy in 1960. During her long and productive teaching career she was a positive influence on the countless students who took her courses in business education. As one of her former students said, "she was always such a positive role model for us, a real lady who showed us how to dress and how to act in the business world." The business world was indeed what she prepared her students for. She built strong ties to local businesses and based her curriculum on the skills they required. She retired from the Academy in 1982 as department head. Her colleagues at SJA were like family to her. She loved the faculty and of course the faculty parties, many of which were held at her house.

Her friends and family will remember her for her gentle, loving manner, her delightful smile, her quick wit and sense of humor, her zest for life, and her famous chocolate chip cookies. The love, support and encouragement she gave her grandkids, along with the special time spent at "Grammy Peck's" will never be forgotten. She enjoyed ceramics classes and made sure that each member of her family had a ceramic Christmas tree. She loved animals, especially her dogs Mitzi, Elfie, Georgie Girl and Daisy. She possessed a deep love of Vermont, especially Miles Pond. She was an active member of the North Congregational Church and the United Workers of North Congregational Church. She stayed physically active, enjoying water-skiing, snowmobiling and skiing, and swam almost daily at the Academy Field House. She enjoyed sugaring in Lunenburg, Vt., with Doug, Marguerite and Mary Jane Beane and Shirley and Linwood Pierce. She volunteered at Life Line and the Red Cross blood drives. In 1993 she was the recipient of the Northeast Kingdom Service Award. She often traveled to Mexico City to visit her "twinnie" with her last visit in 2000, just prior to Isabell's death. She traveled to Spain, Morocco, Europe, Hawaii, Alaska and the West Coast, and enjoyed summer trips to Old Orchard Beach with her family and good friends Kay, Doreen and Ruthie. In 1992, at age 73, she traveled to Alaska with her grandchildren Kevin and Kim. Her love of travel was remarkable. For a woman who grew up and lived most of her life on Clayton Street, St. Johnsbury, Vt., she saw much of the world.

Maybell was a loyal friend. She maintained high school friendships with Shirley Boardman, Loretta Conly and Ruth Barrett; with her sisters-in-law Kay Peck and Esther and Virginia Renfrew; with lifelong friends Doreen Fraser and Nancy Bellefeiulle; and with her Clayton Street neighbors Maggie and Warren Penniman, June and Bob Osgood, Margaret and Frank Hall and their children and grandchildren. She enjoyed Uno, Pit, Boggle and Cribbage games with her grandchildren and friends. She was proud of her Scottish heritage and family ties to Ryegate Vermont, and attended and hosted family reunions for both the Renfrew and Donaghy families. She frequented Tim's Deli, enjoying her "regular" -- a cup of soup and half a tuna on rye.

Maybell leaves behind her two sons, George "Ed" Conly (Pat) of Mount Airy, Md., Alan Conly (Marge) of Cape May, N.J.; her daughter, Marge Audet (Mike) of Bradford, Vt.; her grandchildren: Cathy Giandurco (Jeff), Kevin Conly, Tim Conly (Melanie), Jeff Conly (Amy), Greg Conly (Ginger), Kim Smith and Mike Murray-Smith (Shane). She also was blessed with nine great-grandchildren: Jillian Giandurco, Jeffrey Giandurco, Caitlin Conly, Braedan Conly, Maeve Conly, Dexter Conly, Katie Murray, Kyle Murray-Smith, Matthew Murray-Smith; and one great-great-granddaughter, Chloe Murray; along with many cousins, nieces and nephews.

Maybell was predeceased by her husbands, George Conly and Stanley Peck; and by her siblings: Mamie Maniatty (Speros), Margaret Blake (Albert), Clinton Renfrew (Esther), Isabell Sours (Edwin), and Edwin "Eddie" Renfrew (Virginia); niece, Reita Blake DiSpirito, and nephew, Bill Maniatty.

The world has lost a light. The teacher passed on, but her teaching and her spirit live on in each of us.

The family would like to thank the staff at Canterbury Inn for taking such good care of Maybell. You made Canterbury home to her these last several years and we couldn't have asked for a better place for her to be.

Friends and family are invited to call from 6-8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 6, at Sayles Funeral Home in St. Johnsbury. Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 7, at the North Congregational Church in St. Johnsbury. In lieu of flowers donations can be made to the activities fund at Canterbury Inn, 46 Cherry Street, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819.