



Florida State University
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18th President of ARF (1996-97)
Katherine Hoffman

Katherine Hoffman, 'Eternal' Florida State Figure, Dies at 105

From the 1930s to the 2010s, as a student, professor and distinguished alumna, she was a model citizen in support of the school. She died of Covid-19.



Katherine Hoffman began her association with Florida State University in 1932 and maintained a connection with the university for almost 90 years.

By [Alex Traub](#)

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This obituary is part of a series about people who have died in the coronavirus pandemic. Read about others [here](#).

After serving as dean of women at Florida State University in the late 1960s, Katherine B. Hoffman said that her biggest accomplishment had been abolishing her own position.

Bringing female students under the same administrators as men belonged to a larger agenda: creating greater gender equity at the school. As dean, Ms. Hoffman also eased the dress code for women and abolished their curfew.

“They had to wear essentially what were like trench coats,” Norris Hoffman, Ms. Hoffman’s son, recalled. “F.S.U. still thought that the cars in which women were riding would turn into pumpkins at midnight.”

Ms. Hoffman, who spent 88 years connected to the university, died on July 18 at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare. She was 105. Her son said the cause was Covid-19.

“A couple of people,” Sherrill Ragans, a retired F.S.U. administrator, said, “have sent an email saying, ‘I thought she was eternal.’”

Katherine Marie Blood was born on Aug. 1, 1914, in Winter Haven, Fla. Her father, Norman Wyckoff Blood, “used to take rich Yankees on fishing trips,” Mr. Hoffman said, and later became a citrus grower. Her mother, Laura (McCrary) Blood, was a schoolteacher.

Katherine, known as Kitty, arrived at Florida State College for Women, which later became F.S.U., in 1932. It was the Depression, and her father paid part of her tuition with bundles of oranges.

She went on to become student body president, captain of the women’s baseball and volleyball teams, a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the exemplar of “charm,” as chosen by her fellow graduating classmates in their 1936 yearbook.

Ms. Hoffman had hoped to earn a medical degree from Duke University, but declined to attend on principle after she learned that the school ordered female students to sign a pledge not to marry during their studies. Instead, she obtained a master’s in chemistry from Columbia University in 1938 and married her high school sweetheart, Harold Hoffman, who also became a chemist and was Florida’s assistant commissioner of agriculture.

Ms. Hoffman returned to the Florida State College for Women as a chemistry instructor in 1940. In 1947, the school renamed itself and went coeducational to accommodate some of the millions of veterans seeking to attend college after World War II.

Although she did not have a doctorate, Ms. Hoffman thrived in academia, gaining notice for her skills as a teacher and administrator and writing textbooks for Prentice Hall and McGraw-Hill. She was promoted to full professor in 1959.

When Ms. Hoffman retired, in 1984, it was an occasion to discover new ways to serve her university. She gave lectures on F.S.U.'s history and helped run its sesquicentennial celebration. Following what her son described as moderate donations, the university gave Ms. Hoffman's name to a scholarship, a lecture series and a teaching laboratory. When the lab was rededicated in 2018, she attended the ceremony.

Harold Hoffman died in 1996.

When Ms. Hoffman was 102, her plain-spoken advocacy for women gained a national audience. Outlets including [Vox](#) and [People](#) carried comments she had made to [I Waited 96 Years](#), an initiative to collect interviews with women who were born before the 19th Amendment and who planned to vote for a female presidential candidate (Hillary Clinton) for the first time in 2016.

“This election means that women can achieve anything,” Ms. Hoffman declared.

Well into her 90s, Ms. Hoffman was known to tootle around in a pink Cadillac driven by a fellow nonagenarian. While her son fished for largemouth bass in the Wakulla River, Ms. Hoffman rowed their boat. She hauled gallon jugs of water for the pine trees they had planted.

Norris Hoffman also became a chemistry professor, teaching at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. He retired in 2013.

During Mr. Hoffman's boyhood, he and his mother planted seedlings on the family tree farm. “We would talk about the elements, their names and their properties in the periodic table,” he said. “She was brainwashing me for chemistry.”

