

## Mary Olmstead

Mary Olmstead, 82, died July 13, in Grand Forks at Valley Memorial Nursing Home. She was known in the city as the French teacher at both Central High School and Red River High School. She had also been president of the North Dakota League of Women Voters, worked for the Democratic party, and was an election worker.



Mary Henderson was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on December 30, 1924. She was working her way through Hamline University

as a 'soda jerk' when, at the soda fountain, she met a graduate medical student, Edwin Olmstead. An original 'Rosie the Riveter,' she worked during World War II installing radios in military airplanes. She quit college to move to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to marry Olmstead in Harvard Square and work to help put him through his residency. His work as a doctor took them to Battle Creek, Michigan, where she worked in public health, and subsequently to Dayton, Ohio. There her daughter Andrea was born, but within a year they had moved again—to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Dr. Olmstead was Assistant Head of Medicine at Milwaukee County General Hospital. In Milwaukee her son Kevin and daughter Leslie were born.

In 1957 the family moved to Grand Forks. In 1963 Mary Olmstead did something very unusual at the time: She went back to college, to the University of North Dakota, and earned a degree in French. She was by far the oldest person in her classes at a time when college-age students were, in fact, college age. Her aptitude for languages was enhanced by several trips to all the major countries in Europe, including to the USSR during the Cold War of the 1970s, and to Sweden, where her family had come from. She later studied German at the University and also learned Swedish. In 1970 she moved to Paris and completed her Master's degree in French literature at the Sorbonne.

She taught French literature at the University of Minnesota graduate school in Bemidji, Minnesota, and continued for years to teach French at Red River. Besides being a voracious reader, her other interests included golf, cross-country skiing, and politics.

Mary Olmstead is survived by three children and a son-in-law. Her daughter Andrea, a musician, and son-in-law Larry Thomas Bell, a composer, reside in Boston, Massachusetts. Her son Kevin is a health care worker in Grand Forks, and her daughter, Dr. Leslie Schutz, Professor of Health Sciences at the University of Texas, lives in El Paso, Texas.

Memorials may be given in memory to the American Red Cross.