



Emma Elizabeth French Randel

November 1, 1926 - March 21, 2025

The staff of Heishman Funeral Home/Valley Funeral Service sends condolences to the family of Emma Elizabeth French Randel.

Emma Elizabeth French Randel, a devoted wife, mother, and trailblazing pioneer in Virginia's wine industry, passed away peacefully at her home in Woodstock, Virginia, on March 21, 2025, at the age of 98.

Born on November 1, 1926, in Woodstock, Virginia, Emma was the daughter of Warren B. French Sr. and Lena Sheetz French. The third of eight siblings, she exhibited extraordinary intellect and determination from an early age. At just 16 years old, Emma graduated as valedictorian of Woodstock High School's Class of 1943. She continued her education at Duke University, where she was a member of Alpha Chi Omega sorority and earned a degree in Economics in 1947.

After World War II, Emma moved to Washington, D.C., where she met James B. Randel Jr., who would become her husband and steadfast partner. Together they built a life filled with love and shared purpose. The couple eventually settled in New Jersey for Jim's career and there they raised their five children. She was a devoted mother, making home-cooked meals everyday, including dessert. Emma also found time to give back to her community, including by volunteering at a local hospital where she was a Pink

Lady.

In 1972, Emma and Jim returned to Virginia and planted grapes on their farm in Edinburg — a venture that blossomed into Shenandoah Vineyards, which they opened in 1976. Following Jim's untimely passing shortly thereafter, Emma assumed leadership of the winery with remarkable courage and resolve. Under her long stewardship (only retiring at age 92), Shenandoah Vineyards thrived and became a cornerstone of Virginia's burgeoning wine industry. Today, it stands as the oldest active winery in Virginia — a living testament to Emma's vision and perseverance.

Emma's leadership earned Shenandoah Vineyards' wines numerous awards, but her impact extended far beyond her own vineyard. Her efforts helped elevate Virginia to prominence as a respected wine region. Serving on the Board of Directors of the Virginia Winery Association, and as a member of the Virginia Shenandoah Valley Winery Association and the Shenandoah Valley Wine Growers Association, she mentored new winery owners and championed collaboration over competition, fostering a sense of community within the industry. Emma led efforts to establish the Shenandoah Valley as the first federally recognized wine-producing region in Virginia with an American Viticultural Area designation. Her contributions to the industry were recognized with a number of honors, including the recent Pioneer Award from the Women in Virginia Winery Association and a Resolution of the Senate of Virginia — honors that celebrated her groundbreaking contributions and enduring influence.

A woman of insatiable curiosity and energy, Emma traveled extensively both for fun and to explore wine regions around the globe. Her adventurous spirit also found expression closer to home through her love of tennis, paddle ball, and bridge games with friends — activities she enjoyed well into her later years. She was an avid reader and loved crossword puzzles. She cherished

her time with members of the Woodstock Bridge Club and played with them weekly until very shortly before her passing. She was also a longtime Woodstock Rotary Club member and contributor to the Woodstock International Rotary Foundation, being recognized as a Paul Harris Fellow. She was also a member of the Woodstock United Methodist Church.

Emma's sharp wit and unyielding spirit were defining characteristics throughout her life. Having grown up during the Great Depression and as a member of the Greatest Generation, she embodied resilience and tenacity while maintaining a warm sense of humor, endearing her to all who knew her. She was fun and funny, and always ready for the next adventure.

Emma is predeceased by her parents, husband Jim and seven siblings: Warren B. French, Jr., Millson S. French, Sr., F. Douglas French, Sr., Ellen F. Fuller, Lena F. Fuller, Orrin L. French, Sr. and Sally F. Weber, as well as by brothers-in-law, Clifford L. Fuller, Robert F. Fuller; and sisters-in-law Patrica T. French; Doris F. French; and Marion B. French.

Emma leaves behind a loving family who will treasure her memory forever: children James B. Randel III, Ellen French Randel, Carrie R. Barrett Brown (William), Sally R. Veach (Douglas), Nathan Warren Randel; brother-in-law John Weber and sister-in-law Joyce French; seven grandchildren, Trevor Barrett, Gillian Barrett, Victoria Veach, Foster Veach, Evan Barrett, Mahala "Haley" Randel and Jamie Randel; as well as numerous nieces, nephews, grandnieces, grandnephews and great-grandnieces and greatgrandnephews, as well as many friends who adored her deeply.

Emma's legacy is one of innovation, strength, generosity, and love — a legacy that will continue to inspire all who knew her personally or through her transformative work in shaping Virginia's wine industry for generations to

come.

The family would like to thank the loving caregivers who assisted attending to Emma during the final months of her life.

Visitation will be Friday, April 4, 2025, from 6 - 8 p.m. at Valley Funeral Service in Edinburg, Virginia. The funeral service will be held at Woodstock United Methodist Church in Woodstock, Virginia on Saturday, April 5, 2025 at 3:00 p.m. Burial will follow at Massanutten Cemetery, in Woodstock, Virginia.

Pallbearers will be grandchildren Trevor Barrett, Evan Barrett, and Foster Veach and grand-nephews David Lambert, Jacob French and A.J. Price.

Memorial donations may be made in lieu of flowers to the American Heart Association at <https://pages.heart.org>; the American Cancer Society at <https://donate.cancer.org>; and the Rotary Foundation at www.my.rotary.org/en/donate.

Online condolences may be left at www.valleyfs.com

Arrangements by Heishman Funeral Home Inc., Valley Funeral Service Branch, Edinburg.

Cemetery Details

Massanutten Cemetery

Benchhoff Drive
Woodstock, VA 22664

Previous Events

Visitation

APR 4. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Valley Funeral Service
14116 South Middle Road
Edinburg, VA 22824
(540) 984-3700
secretary.valleyfs@yahoo.com
<https://www.valleyfs.com>

Funeral Service

APR 5. 3:00 PM (ET)

Woodstock United Methodist Church
156 S. Muhlenberg St
Woodstock, VA 22664

Tribute Wall

JD

“ It was a rainy day in June of 2001. I was visiting my Los Angeles neighbor who had just moved with her family to New Market . I was determined to make Shenandoah Vineyards before closing. Off we drove with a downpour making us drive faster. Emma was about to close. But never one to lose a sale she welcomed us in. Easy on conversation and seeing a Help Wanted sign , I encourage my friend T.C. To fill out an application . T.C. Goble did and she started work within the next week . So for the next twenty years plus Emma got T.C. on the payroll and me every year on my visits. Never left without a case of the best wine in Virginia. Emma , your elegance was warmth with country charm. Your business mind was one to be admired and respected . You could cut to the chase without anyone knowing . I was a huge fan . I picked up plenty on my short visits. Always with a twinkle . The camera loved you. Thank you allowing me to savor a small amount of your life . You touched so many . You always put a smile on my face . The Angels must be having too much fun with you joining the club. .

Jane Dawson - April 05, 2025 at 03:53 AM

VA

“ Vince, Wendy and Alex purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Emma Elizabeth French Randel.



Vince, Wendy and Alex - April 01, 2025 at 12:10 PM

WM

“ With Much Love, Sarah, Neal & Riley McD planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Emma Elizabeth French Randel.

With Much Love, Sarah, Neal & Riley McD - March 28, 2025 at 10:09 PM

WM

“ With Much Love, Sarah, Neal & Riley McD purchased the Beautiful Dreams for the family of Emma Elizabeth French Randel.



With Much Love, Sarah, Neal & Riley McD - March 28, 2025 at 10:09 PM

LF

“ Love, Jet and Terry Flannery purchased the Written in the Stars for the family of Emma Elizabeth French Randel.



Love, Jet and Terry Flannery - March 28, 2025 at 06:40 PM

JS

“ I am very sorry for your Mom's passing, my thoughts and memories of Emma are happy ones, when I worked at the vineyard after I moving from N.J. Emma ran a "great ship" and I always wanted to please her in her dedication to her beloved vineyard. RIP Emma.

janice scrabis - March 28, 2025 at 10:46 AM



“ Joyful Memory was purchased for the family of
Emma Elizabeth French Randel.



March 26, 2025 at 04:55 PM