

# ELIZABETH ADAMS DANIELS

## Vassar College Professor Emerita of English, Vassar College Historian Emerita

**Born:** *May 8, 1920*  
Westport, CT

**Poughkeepsie, NY/Middlebury, VT** – Elizabeth (“Betty”) Adams Daniels, who led a vibrant and healthy life, died at age 93 on January 28, 2014, with family by her side. For the last six months she had been residing in Gardensong, the memory care wing of Eastview at Middlebury. Betty moved to Vermont in 2012, reluctantly leaving behind her Vassar College community and many friends. Orphaned in her teens when first her mother and, soon after, her father died, Betty often said that Vassar was truly her alma mater—her fostering mother—and she spent her adult life committed to the college. Through her many years there, first as a student and then as a professor, administrator, and college historian, she was a cherished and much admired member of a community in which she found inspiration, support, friendship, and love.

Born in Westport, Connecticut in 1920, Betty went to Vassar in 1937 and worked her way through college by baking and selling brownies. She was selected Phi Beta Kappa her junior year, graduated Summa Cum Laude from Vassar in 1941, received her master’s from the University of Michigan, and her PhD from NYU where she was recognized as the “graduate student of the year” in 1954. Betty married John Lothrop Daniels on March 21, 1942, in New York City, and they eventually settled in Poughkeepsie with their growing family.

Betty began teaching in the English Department at Vassar in 1948 and was perceived by her students as fair, firm, and sometimes formidable. In addition to teaching Victorian literature, she held many other positions over the course of her 65-year career, including freshman dean, dean of studies, acting dean of the faculty, and chair of the English Department.

In the mid 1960s, Betty played a key role in Vassar’s transition to coeducation. Then dean of studies, she served on the Vassar-Yale Study Committee tasked with exploring the possibility of a merger between the two institutions, and later, she chaired the Committee on Alternatives, exploring the possibility of a coeducational Vassar instead of a relocation to New Haven. Once the decision to go coed had



been made, she served on the Committee on New Dimensions, developing “The Comprehensive Plan,” including a new curriculum that is the backbone of the Vassar curriculum today.

During her time at Vassar, Betty knew six Vassar College presidents and worked under five, often researching historical questions and providing content for speeches. She discovered and saved a treasure trove of archival material from the basement of Main Building; authored, coauthored, or edited eight books about the college, its buildings, its presidents, and its history; and became the go-to person for information about the college.

In 1985 (when she was 65 years old), she “retired for the weekend,” as she put it, and then went to work the following Monday as the first Vassar College historian, a position she devoted herself to for more than 20 years.

In recent years, Betty created the Vassar online encyclopedia with the assistance of her colleague Colton Johnson and many Vassar students, leaving future generations the legacy of her vast knowledge of the college. In 2006, the Alumnae and Alumni Association of Vassar College awarded her the “Spirit of Vassar” award.

While Vassar College was Betty’s anchor, she raised a family of four and was a role model to other women. She is survived by her son, John Lothrop Daniels of Nantucket and his wife, Susan Atwood;

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Middlebury, VT

daughter, Sherwood Adams Daniels of Richmond, VT, and her husband, Ted Yeates; and daughter, Ann Sheffield Daniels of Denver, CO, and her husband, David Ross. She was predeceased by her husband, John Lothrop Daniels, and daughter, Eleanor Bradford Daniels. She is also survived by six grandchildren and two great grandchildren: Reuel Sanford Daniels of Oakland, CA; Justin Saxton Braman and wife, Eliza Rachel Botsford of Watertown, MA; Wilder Adams Daniels and wife, Pamela of Boulder, CO; Carrie Adams Braman and partner, V.J. Guarino of Northport, ME; Douglas Brownell Yeates of Ketchum, ID; John (Jake) Lothrop Daniels of Dedham, MA; and great-grandchildren Casey Appleton

Braman of Watertown, MA, and Violet Autumn Daniels, of Boulder, CO.

Betty and John were active and social in the Poughkeepsie, NY, community. She loved reading, traveling, vacationing by the sea, swimming, playing tennis with her family and friends, walking to work from her house of 50 years on College Avenue, and hosting many a party. She was on numerous boards over the years, including the Mid-Hudson Alzheimer’s Association, which had special meaning to her as John lived with Alzheimer’s for 11 years during which she took care of him for seven. In 2008, after John’s death, Betty joined the community at Arbor Ridge in nearby Rhinebeck, but continued to work at the college until, at age 92, she moved to Vermont to be closer to family.

There will be a “life-celebration” at the Vassar College Alumnae House in Poughkeepsie, New York, later in the spring. The Elizabeth A. Daniels ‘41 Fund for Special Collections was created in 2010 to honor Betty’s 90th birthday and to support archival work at the college. If they wish to do so, friends may make a gift in her memory to Vassar College for the Elizabeth A. Daniels ‘41 Fund, Vassar College, Box 725, 124 Raymond Avenue, Poughkeepsie, NY, 12604 or to the Mid-Hudson Alzheimer’s Association, 2 Jefferson Plaza, Poughkeepsie, NY, 12601. Family can be contacted at [eadanielsfamily@gmail.com](mailto:eadanielsfamily@gmail.com).