

In Memoriam: Mary Rita Miller

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Mary Rita Miller was born near Williamsburg, Iowa, southwest of the city of Cedar Rapids, on March 4, 1920. She died in Frederick, Maryland, on April 10, 2008. Her parents were J. Carl Rush and Bernadette (O'Meara) Rush. After getting a degree in music at the University of Iowa, Mary Rita served with the Army Intelligence in Spain during the Second World War. After the war, she was one of the first women to be a flight attendant on airplanes in the United States. She worked with American Airlines.

Mary Rita married C. Glenn Miller, of Oklahoma, in 1947. Their son Ronald was born in 1950. During the 1950s and 1960s, they lived in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, New York, California, Colorado, Canada and Germany. When she was in Colorado, she received a Master's degree in 1962 in modern languages from Denver University. Glenn and Mary Rita moved to Washington DC in 1965. Mary Rita earned a PhD in linguistics in 1968 at Georgetown University. She became a professor in the

Department of English at the University of Maryland at College Park. She retired in 1991.

Mary Rita served on the Board of the American Name Society, and was its president in 1988. She was the author of two books. The first was *Place-Names of the Northern Neck of Virginia, from John Smith's 1606 map to the present*, published by the Virginia State Library in 1983. The second book was *Children of the Salt River*, a study of language among Pima children in Arizona.

Glenn had introduced Mary Rita to Virginia's Northern Neck. In 1965, she bought a country house near the Potomac River. She observed that many of the houses and mansions had names, so she called her property Somerfield Deer Park, using Glenn's mother's surname and three deer eating the grass on her lawn. Glenn died in 1987. Mary Rita then married Judge William Gibbons. He died in 2001.

In the Festschrift in honor of Donald Orth (Names, Sept/Dec 2000), Mary Rita wrote an article about the *Land of Pleasant Living: Names in Virginia's Northern Neck*. The Northern Neck is 70 miles long, with the Potomac River on its north side and the Rappahannock River on the south side. The names of the rivers had been used by the natives who had been living there in the early 1600s. There were other physical features in the Northern Neck that had been named by the natives; e.g., Great Wicomico River, Currioman Bay, and Totuskey Creek.

The names of the counties in the Northern Neck are from England: Westmoreland, Northumberland, Lancaster, Richmond, and King George. The towns and villages are named after places in the British Isles: Kilmarnock, Kinsale and Montross from Ireland; Farnham and Stratford from England; Warsaw, the seat of Richmond County, was named after the capital of Poland, encouraging the Polish people, who were being attacked by other countries in central Europe in the early 1800s.