MARY BLANCHE SCHWEIKERT ANSARI

At A Glance

Birth: January 15, 1939, Lincoln, Illinois.

Death: December 18, 2020, Incline Village, Nevada.

Maiden Name: Mary Blanche Schweikert

Race/nationality/ethnic background: White

Married:
John Spellman, December 29, 1958;
Nazir Ansari, June 4, 1970.

Children: Eric Spellman, 1961-1991

Primary city and county of residence and work:
Reno, Washoe County

Major Fields of work: Librarian, philanthropist.

Other role identities: Writer



Mary Schweikert Ansari
Legacy.com

University librarian renowned for map collection, philanthropy

Head librarian for all University of Nevada, Reno campus libraries, Mary Ansari turned her library and research expertise into creating the largest collection of maps in Nevada, housed in the Mackey School of Mines at UNR. She and her husband Nazir Ansari made significant financial contributions to the Nevada University system and to northern Nevada community organizations.

Mary Blanche Schweikert was born on January 15, 1939, in Lincoln, Illinois, the only child of Blanche E. Crafton and Reinhold J. Schweikert. She graduated from Lincoln Community High School in 1957, where she had been involved in student council, the student newspaper, and Honor Society. She attended University of Missouri Columbia for her first year of college, where she joined the Chi Omega Sorority. She then spent the next year at Newcomb Women's College in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she studied finance. In December 1958, she married John Spellman, who also grew up in Lincoln. In June 1959, after the semester was over, they moved to Champaign, Illinois, where they both attended University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Mary graduated from college in 1961 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and in 1963 she earned her master's in library science there. In 1961 she also gave birth to her son, Eric Spellman, who was raised by his paternal grandparents in Lincoln. Eric died at age 30 in a pickup accident. That marriage dissolved, and while at U of I, Mary would meet Nazir Ansari, who was earning his doctorate in business administration. After he graduated and started teaching at

Western Michigan University, Mary earned her Master of Business Administration at the same institution, bringing their combined number of graduate degrees to five.

After Mary graduated from Western Michigan in 1967, she followed Nazir to Reno, where he had gotten a job in the UNR College of Business Administration. Mary then started her career at the University of Nevada library as a reference librarian. By 1969, she was the mines librarian for the Mackay School of Mines and started compiling maps for the library to store. That map library would become a great undertaking and is still held at UNR today as the largest map collection in Nevada.



Mary Ansari
Nevada Today, UNR

Mary and Nazir became extremely important to the UNR community, with Nazir becoming chairman of the Department of Managerial Sciences in the Business College, and Mary continuing to grow UNR's map and government document collection. Mary once explained, "I was always crazy about maps. I could pour [sic] over them for hours." The information Mary collected was incredibly important to students and professionals in engineering and mining industries. The collection grew so large that in 1978 the Mackay School of Mines Library moved from the School of Mines building into the larger Getchell library, gaining an extra 4,100 square feet. By 1987, Mary was the head librarian for all seven library departments on campus. In 1988, she served as a chairman of the Geological Society of America, and in 1990, she was elected president of the Geoscience Information Society. In 1991, her map collection was officially named the Mary Ansari Map Library, honoring Mary's huge influence in spearheading the resource collection.

Mary and Nazir both enjoyed long and successful careers on UNR's campus and retired together in 1994. At the time of their retirement, they were already one of the most generous modern benefactors of the university. Nazir had donated $100,000 to the university in 1991, partially due to the school's early support of Mary's map library. They created an endowment fund to support the map library in the Mackay School of Mines, to ensure the library would continue to be funded. In 1995, UNR renamed the College of Business Building the Nazir Ansari Building, and the couple were both awarded the Nevada Alumni Association University Service Award. In 2000, they created the Nazir and Mary Ansari Business Government Information Center Fund. Mary also served as a trustee of the University of Nevada, Reno Foundation from 1995-2000. The university gave Mary an honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters in 2000 for these significant philanthropic contributions, and the couple received the Distinguished Nevadan honor from the Nevada Board of Regents in 2007. Mary's honorary doctorate brought their total graduate degrees to six.



Drs. Nazir and Mary Ansari
Junior Achievement of Nevada

Their generosity did not end with the college. Mary and Nazir established scholarships and awards at Truckee Meadows Community College, Sierra Nevada College, and the Desert Research Institute. Mary was on the board for the Incline Village Hospital Foundation. In 1992, Mary donated $3,500 to her hometown library in Lincoln, Illinois, to honor her late parents and her son. In 1993, they both were honored at a Rotary Club luncheon for donating $5,000 towards humanitarian work. As they were introduced at the luncheon, they revealed their actual donation -- $20,000 more than their original pledge. In 1999, the couple pledged $50,000 to the Boys and Girls Club of Truckee Meadows. In 2008, Nazir and Mary were honored with the President's Medal from the Desert Research Institute for their philanthropy. These are only a few examples of the many, many charitable actions of Mary and her husband.

Nazir and Mary both loved the northern Nevada area and moved from Reno to Incline Village upon retirement. Mary had also created the Nevada County Names book series, using her love of maps to publish several informational books on the area. She loved to write and even published a fiction novel in 2020, based heavily on her real-life struggles.



Mary passed away in her Incline Village home on December 18, 2020. She was 81. She died of lung cancer, even though she had never smoked. Mary is buried in Our Mother of Sorrows Cemetery, in Reno, Nevada. Her marker reads, "She was a walks far woman."

Her love for education was a driving force, both in her own education and helping many others. Her position as a librarian offered physical opportunities to research, while her generous philanthropic contributions gave generational and wide-reaching education for countless Nevadans. She and her husband Nazir have forever changed the University of Nevada and Northern Nevada through their generosity.

Mary Ansari's Published Works

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2020 *The Bobwhite Doesn't Always Sing*. LeRue Press. Reno, Nevada.

Researched by Patti Bernard and written by Aubrey Garrard, 2026.

Sources of Information

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