

Asa Curtis LaFrance, age 99, died peacefully in his sleep on Sunday, November 11, 2012 at Blenheim in Middletown, RI. Mr. LaFrance moved to Newport in 1977 from Elmira, NY when he retired from his family's legacy fire truck manufacturing and export business. He was married to the late Barbara Blake LaFrance. He is survived by two daughters, Karen Ruth LaFrance, of Phoenix, AZ and Margaret Haviland LaFrance of Saratoga Springs, NY and his niece Helen Ruth Burch of Roanoke, VA.

Mr. LaFrance had a life-long interest in history probably kindled at the age of ten, when, in 1923, he wrote a letter to Mustapha Kemal Ataturk, the new President of the new Turkish Republic. Ataturk responded with a letter "to an American boy" which Mr. LaFrance saved and treasured for many years. The young Mr. LaFrance's correspondence sparked wide coverage in LIFE Magazine at the time because Ataturk's response was the first letter written by him to any Western country. In 1998, Mr. LaFrance was able to give this letter to the National Ataturk Museum in Ankara--with great fanfare in the press-- when he traveled there with his daughter Karen under auspices of the Turkish Minister of Culture.

Mr. LaFrance graduated from Yale University in 1935 with a degree in French and held a Master's in Slavic Languages from Columbia University. He also studied at Charles University in Prague in 1938-1939. He worked in government service during World War II using his extensive linguistic abilities in service to the national war effort. When he moved back to his home town of Elmira in the 1950's, he again brought his linguistic abilities to bear, travelling extensively in Mexico and Central and South America on behalf of the family business. In Elmira, he was Trustee and religious education instructor at Park Congregational Church.

Mr. LaFrance and his wife were members of many organizations in Newport often serving on boards of directors including the Newport Art Museum, Newport Historical Society, the Preservation Society of Newport County, Redwood Library, Newport Music Festival, Quindecim and Alliance Francaise of Newport. For the Newport Review, Mr. LaFrance wrote articles on his experiences in pre-World War II Europe, Count Rochambeau and Edith Wharton in Newport. Mr. LaFrance volunteered extensively throughout the community and drove for Meals on Wheels well into his 90's. The Newport Daily News honored him as Volunteer of the Year in 2005.

Mr. and Mrs. LaFrance were members of the Newport Congregational Church. As such, they were legacy supporters of the effort to save the church with its unique John La Farge-decorated interior. Mr. LaFrance was first Treasurer for the La Farge Restoration Fund, the stewardship nonprofit now dedicated to the restoration of Newport's most recently-designated National Historic Landmark.

A service of celebration is scheduled at Newport Congregational Church (corner of Spring and Pelham Streets) on Thursday, November 15, 2012 at 4:00 PM. In lieu of flowers, contributions to the La Farge Restoration Fund, 73 Pelham St., Newport, RI 02840, would be gratefully accepted in honor of Mr. LaFrance.

Additional information at www.memorialfuneralhome.com