



Barbara Meyer Elsner

August 25, 2025

Barbara Elsner, 99, of Milwaukee, passed away on August 25, 2025.

She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in Social Work.

Barbara was preceded in death by her loving husband of 72 years, Robert R. Elsner II.

She is survived by her brother, James Meyer; her children, Robert R. III (Colleen Malone) Elsner, Mary (Edward Kehm) Elsner, Katherine (Michael) Lilek, John (Jennifer Lab Elsner) Elsner, Margaret Howland; and eight grandchildren, Lauren, Claire, John, Nicholas, Helen, Jaxon, Emilio, and Wyatt.

A devoted preservationist and community leader, Barbara dedicated her life to protecting historic architecture, supporting the arts and promoting social welfare. She was a founding board member of the Water Tower Landmark Trust, the Historic Water Tower Neighborhood Association, the Milwaukee Ballet, Penfield Children's Center, Frank Lloyd Wright Wisconsin Heritage Tourism, Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, and served on many other non-profit boards.

Her tireless advocacy helped save landmarks such as the County Emergency Hospital (now Grand Avenue Middle School) and the Pabst Mansion. She also championed the restoration of Frank Lloyd Wright sites, including the Romeo and Juliet Windmill at Taliesin and the Seth Peterson Cottage on Mirror Lake. Over the years, she received numerous honors, including the Frederick L. Olson Preservation Award from the Milwaukee County Historical Society, the Burnham Block Visionary Award, and a State of Wisconsin Citation of the Assembly Award.

Beyond her public work, Barbara cherished her deep friendships and drew great joy from her legendary Book Club, which for decades was a source of spirited conversation, laughter, and connection. She was a world traveler and keen athlete who pursued knowledge and beauty throughout her life.

A memorial service will take place at 2:00 PM on September 21 at St. John's on the Lake, located at 1840 N Prospect Avenue in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The gathering will be held in the North Cultural Arts Center.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Barbara's memory may be made to:

Frank Lloyd Wright's Burnham Block
SaveWright.org
The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy
53 W Jackson Blvd STE 720, Chicago, IL 60604

Friends of Burnham Block
Wrightinmilwaukee.org
PO Box 26907
Milwaukee, WI. 53226

Penfield Child Center

PenfieldChildren.org/donate/

833 N. 26th Street

Milwaukee, WI 53233

Previous Events

Memorial Service

SEP 21. 2:00 PM (CT)

St. John's on the Lake
1840 North Prospect Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Memorial Gathering

SEP 21 (CT)

North Cultural Arts Center at St. Johns on the Lake
1840 North Prospect Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202