

Phyllis Patterson, 82
January 25, 1932 - May 18, 2014
Renaissance Pleasure Faire Founder
Education & Entertainment Innovator

Renaissance Pleasure Faire creator Phyllis Ann (Stimbert) Patterson, of Novato, California, died on May 18th, 2014, at the age of 82. Over the past 53 years, Phyllis Patterson touched the lives of millions of guests at her events and became mentor and symbolic mother to generations of participants.

She was born on January 25th, 1932, in Omaha, Nebraska, to Mildred Irene and Elden Carl Stimbert; her father became Superintendent of City Schools in Memphis, Tennessee, where Phyllis attended Messick High School.

While earning her B.A. in English at Memphis State College in the mid-1950s, Phyllis wrote and directed one of the very first broadcast television shows, *Phyll's Playhouse*, and was a DJ on "all-girl" station WHER. In 1956 she married artist and Air Force officer Ron Patterson, and the newlyweds moved to Los Angeles, where Phyllis began teaching high school English and history.

In 1960, while expecting son Kevin, Phyllis and Ron created "Into the Woods," a backyard drama-and-arts program at the Patterson's Laurel Canyon home in the Hollywood Hills, and later taught art and drama at the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts. In response to students' enthusiasm for *Commedia dell'arte*, Phyllis enlisted Pacifica radio station KPFK to sponsor the very first Renaissance Faire in America on May 11th-12th, 1963 at a local park called "Haskell's Raskells Ranch."

When the Pattersons relocated the Faire to the Old Paramount (movie studio) Ranch in Agoura, California, Phyllis was instrumental in establishing legal precedence allowing public gatherings in rural locations throughout California and the west, cajoling LA's 1950s-style bureaucracies into approving the "Faire," one of the first organized creative expressions of the early 1960s.

In 1966, while expecting the birth of son Brian, the Pattersons expanded their event to the San Francisco Bay Area. China Camp (now a State Park) in Marin County was the Faire's first Northern California location and was highlighted by psychedelic ethnic music groups and bohemian artists. It outgrew that setting and moved to the old Satori Ranch at Black Point in Novato in 1971. They established the Living History Centre, where workshops and performances flourished in the landmark Red Barn, and thousands of school-age kids came to the Faire Village mid-week for "Workshops in the Woods."

The “Blackpoint Forest” (Northern Cal) and “Paramount Ranch” (Southern Cal) Renaissance Pleasure Faires not only supported a way of life for many counterculture trail blazers, they became world famous as hundreds of thousands of guests, many in costume, engaged in the rediscovered seasonal rituals of mummers plays, parades, pageants and traditional revelry. “The Faire reminds us of simpler times more in touch with nature and the world,” said Phyllis.

In 1970, the Great Dickens Christmas Fair was brought to life in San Francisco, using the same techniques of immersive interaction to draw visitors into an exuberant holiday experience of Victorian London. Now in its 36th season, and organized by son and daughter-in-law Kevin and Leslie Patterson, and performed in by son Brian Patterson, it continues as a family legacy and popular feature of San Francisco’s holiday season.

The early Renaissance Pleasure Faires have had a visible influence on American culture: the crafts revival of the 1960s to 1970s; gourmet foods at festivals; musical hybrids involving ethnic, folk and psychedelic genres; the “psychedelic fop” fashions ultimately embodied by such popular musicians as Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, and Jim Morrison; the introduction to Americans of many British foods and beverages. Tony Award-winning actor Bill Irwin, mime Robert Shields, magicians Penn and Teller, The Flying Karamazov Brothers, and the Reduced Shakespeare Company, all performed at Faires early in their careers. As the Living History Centre promoted the concept of first-person interpretive living history and improvisational theater, its value to the larger world was beginning to be recognized. Phyllis became a living-history consultant for the California State Parks, Plymouth Plantation, Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, and Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. Phyllis's legacy extends to the United Kingdom as well, where a former student produces living history at the Tower of London and other Royal properties.

Phyllis will be missed—and remembered by all those she loved, influenced, inspired and transformed—with immense gratitude and great affection.

She is survived by her two sons Kevin and Brian Patterson; her daughter-in-law Leslie Patterson and family; her grandsons Andrew and Michael Patterson; her brother Vaughn Stimbert and niece Cindy Sands and family of Memphis, TN; and niece Susan Bullock and family of Virginia.

For more news of pending memorial plans, visit fairehistory.org and join the email list.