



Dr. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

July 21, 1940 - June 12, 2026

Coleman Funeral Home of Oxford

Dr. Benjamin Fisher died at The Magnolia in Oxford, Mississippi, on Friday, June 12. He was 85.

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV was born July 21, 1940, in Pennsylvania. He was the youngest of three siblings and was known as “Johnny” to family members. From childhood he loved reading, traveling, trying new foods, and meeting people from all walks of life. He grew up in a thirty-two-room home among three generations. The population swelled during Thanksgiving, when other relatives came to visit and stayed through Easter. He was raised on stories of his illustrious ancestors: Isaac Causten, a veteran of the American Revolution; James H. Causten, a claims agent in the matter of French spoliations who refused Edgar Allan Poe’s request to pursue his aunt’s claim against the U.S. Government; and (best of all) Ben’s namesake General B. F. Fisher, first head of the U.S. Signal Corp. “The General,” as B. F. Fisher was known, had married Alice Causten (thereby establishing a link to Dolley Madison and the Shriber family and several notables in U.S. history) and had also escaped from the notorious Libby Prison during the Civil War. In later years, Ben even began to look like his great-grandfather! Other stories involved Calvin P. W. Fisher, M.D., assistant surgeon of the 148th Pennsylvania, and Lt. John H. Fisher, 138th Pennsylvania, who fell at The Wilderness in 1864.

Professor Fisher earned his BA in English at Ursinus College (where he met a brother of the current Dalai Lama and a Japanese missionary who were studying at Ursinus and famously took them home for the weekend). He then earned an MA and PhD at Duke University. After completing his studies at Duke, he taught at The University of Pennsylvania and Hahnemann Medical College, where he chaired the Humanities Department, before moving south to The University of Mississippi Department of English in 1979. At Ole Miss he edited *University of Mississippi Studies in English* for many years. He retired as Professor Emeritus of English in 2011.

Dr. Fisher's main interest and dissertation subject was Edgar Allan Poe, and he remained active in the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore and the Poe Studies Association long after retirement. Like most academics, his interests were many and wide-ranging, and he published on Victorian subjects and served on the board of *Victorian Poetry* and the *A. E. Housman Society Journal* (American Vice President of the Society), published on the Gothic and was active in the International Gothic Association, did work on the Pre-Raphaelites, and published on mystery writers such as Frederick Irving Anderson and John Dickson Carr. His master's thesis was on Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Dr. Fisher combined his love of people and love of travel with his academic vocation by stopping at libraries everywhere and maintaining friendships with librarians, book dealers, and scholars worldwide. He loved books, reading, research, and writing and was always happiest in the company of like minds. He attended numerous academic conferences every year and encouraged students and colleagues to do likewise. He maintained lifelong friendships with his teachers from Orwigsburg, Ursinus, and Duke, and colleagues at Hahnemann and Penn, always stopping to say hello and update them on his work. He kept up a voluminous correspondence with scholars and friends

around the world. If another researcher might have information he required, he would write to that person. Inevitably, these innocents would write back, having no idea they were now “on the list” of correspondents and would receive letters, postcards, and Christmas cards in perpetuity.

Students were Dr. Fisher’s priority, however. He believed they were at an educational institution to learn and to finish their degrees in due course. He often had groups of students in his home for dinner (sometimes prepared on his wood-burning cookstove), bringing together visitors, graduate students, undergraduates, and townspeople for lively discussions. He loved preparing snitz and knepp, a Pennsylvania Dutch dish of dried apples and dumplings, which one student rechristened “kibbles and bits.” Ben became known for offering advice on thesis and dissertation topics and research techniques, helping numerous students finish their degrees. He frequently read drafts while on vacation, marking up the papers while his wife drove, and then stopping along the way to mail them to students for revision. Until the end of his life, former students stayed in touch, updating him on their teaching, publications, and family lives.

In 1993 Ben’s daughter Hattie was born. His daughter Helen followed in 2000. His daughters were the lights of his life. They became his ultimate teaching experience as he read to them, fed them, ferried them to school and activities, and watched with pride as they grew into young women. He loved being a dad and was up for any shenanigans they proposed—going to a bookstore, shopping for makeup or clothes, making poundcake every day for three weeks, or traveling to visit relatives in Delaware and Pennsylvania during the summer. Ben’s daughters filled his home and completed his life.

Ben is predeceased by his parents, B. Frank Fisher and Mary E. Kantner Fisher and his stepmother Edith Pflum Fisher. He is also predeceased by his

sister Mary F. Michael and brother-in-law Richard Michael and by his brother C. A. "Jim" Fisher (Anapera). Also predeceasing him is his father-in-law Richard C. Karsten (Janet).

Ben is survived by his former student, research assistant, editor, traveling companion, and wife of 36 years, Julie, and his daughters Hattie Movitz (Alex) of Broomfield, Colorado, and Helen Fisher (Alex) of Camp Verde, Arizona. Also surviving are a special nephew, Mark Michael (Lynne) of Rota, Marianas Islands, and a sister-in-law, Anapera Kellett Fisher (C. A.) of Annapolis, Maryland. Additional survivors are his mother-in-law Janet Karsten (Richard) of Oxford, Mississippi, and brothers-in-law Thomas Karsten (Machelle) of Batesville, Mississippi, John Karsten of Southaven, Mississippi, and Robert Karsten of Pope, Mississippi. He leaves behind numerous nieces and nephews. Ben is also survived by his thousands of students from fifty years of teaching, as well as his many, many friends and fellow bibliophiles.

The family thanks the friends and former students who enriched Ben's life with visits, phone calls, cards, letters, and email messages throughout the years. News of your lives and achievements made him very happy. We also thank the staff members of Baptist Memorial Hospital, Arden Home Health & Hospice, Oxford Health & Rehabilitation Center, and The Magnolia at Oxford Commons for your care. We send special thanks to the staff of Magnolia Small Animal Hospital for assisting with our pets during Ben's illness.

Arrangements are private. Anyone so inclined may make a memorial to The University of Mississippi Friends of the Library at <https://umfoundation.givingfuel.com/fol/?&selectFund=Library%20Friends%20Program%20Fund%20%5B05690%5D>

The staff at Coleman Funeral Home of Oxford is honored to serve the family during this challenging season of life. Condolences may be expressed online

on his Tribute wall at www.colemanfuneralhomeox.com

Tribute Wall

Jl

“ *What a great loss! He was the best scholar I knew, and very kind to me always.*

James B. Potts III - 1 hour ago

DK

“ *Dr Fisher was a very influential professor during my years as a Ph.D. student in English at UM. He was a consummate scholar who was rigorous in his expectations of students' work but delivered his corrections and suggestions for improvement with kindness and a unique sense of humor. He enriched many students' lives with his generous hospitality. Condolences to all the Fisher family from George and Deborah Kehoe.*

Deborah Kehoe - 2 hours ago