



Katherine Johnson

August 26, 1918 - February 24, 2020

Died: Newport News, Virginia

Interment: Hampton, Virginia

Katherine Johnson died at a retirement home in Newport News, Virginia, on February 24, 2020. She was one hundred and one. Born Creola Katherine Coleman in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, on August 26, 1918, she finished high school at fourteen, graduated from West Virginia State at eighteen, and was one of the first Black graduate students at West Virginia University before marriage and Jim Crow paused the transcript.

In 1953 she joined the West Area Computing section at NACA's Langley laboratory - Black women mathematicians in a segregated wing, checking the men's numbers and then replacing them. Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson were colleagues in that room before the film found the story. She calculated trajectories for Alan Shepard's flight and, when John Glenn refused to fly until she had verified the IBM's output, she ran the same equations by hand. She later worked orbital mechanics for Apollo and the early space shuttle. The citations on the papers were slow to include her name. Langley put her name on a building while she could still walk into it. She treated the honor as a late citation, not a rewrite of the years the papers had omitted her.

She stayed in the Hampton Roads cities that held the lab: Hampton, Newport News, a church choir, two marriages, three daughters. The movie arrived late and loud. She accepted the Medal of Freedom in 2015 the way she had accepted a desk - politely, and then went back to talking about the math.

A funeral was held at Hampton University. She was buried in Hampton, Virginia. White Sulphur Springs was the start. Langley was the work. Newport News was the last address.

Services

Died in Newport News, Virginia, on February 24, 2020. Funeral at Hampton University. Interment in Hampton, Virginia.

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