

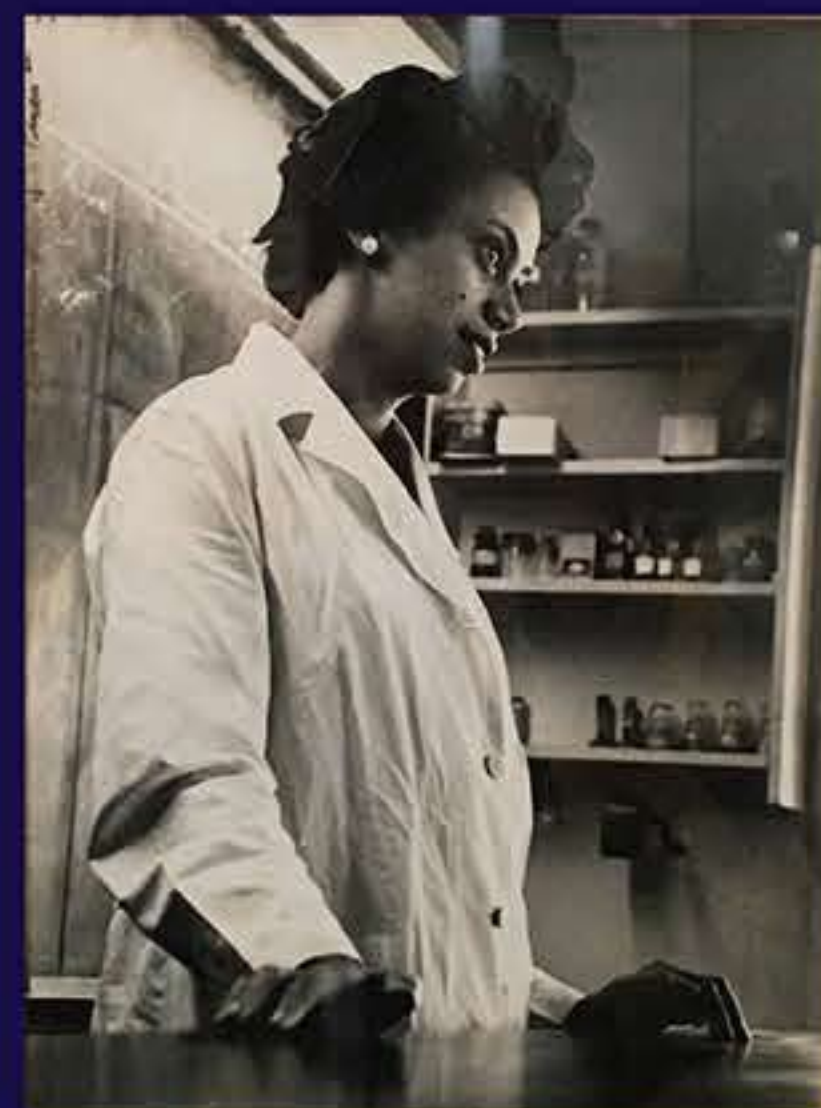
Honoring Jewel Plummer Cobb



Jewel Plummer Cobb (1924-2017) was a distinguished scientist, an accomplished educator, and a staunch advocate of the rights of women and people of color. Throughout her career, when necessary, she defied racism and sexism. Her experiences with doing so led to her guiding others confronted with the same obstacles as they also pursued goals in science.

Many Woods Hole and Falmouth residents considered her an admired colleague, a revered mentor, and a dear neighbor and friend.

In September 2020, a petition of more than 600 signatures was submitted to the Falmouth Select Board urging that the name of Agassiz Road be changed to "Jewel Cobb Road." The intention of the petitioners was to reject the racist theories espoused by Louis Agassiz and affirm the inclusive values of Jewel Cobb. On November 23, 2020, the Falmouth Select Board voted unanimously to approve the name change.



Dr. Cobb was a cell biologist. Cell biology is the study of the structure and function of the cell, the basic unit of life. Cells are usually microscopic in size and compose all living things including animals, plants, fungi, protists, bacteria, and archaea. In biomedical research, cell biology is used to find out how cells normally work, and how disturbances in normal function can result in disease.

Dr. Cobb studied the relationship between skin pigment melanin and skin damage, and the effects of hormones, ultraviolet light, and chemotherapy agents on cell division. She provided the first evidence for the UVA/UVB shielding properties of melanin, which explains the large disparity in skin cancer rates between people with dark skin tones and those with light skin tones. She was particularly successful in culturing cancer cells directly from patient biopsies, which she used to study the effects of different chemotherapy drugs on cellular morphology, migration, and growth. Dr. Cobb discovered that methotrexate was effective in the treatment of certain skin and lung cancers, and childhood leukemia. This drug is still used in treatment of a variety of cancers and autoimmune diseases. She was one of the first to publish data on actinomycin D and its ability to cause a reduction of nucleoli in the nucleus of normal and malignant human cells. Her research is still referred to in creating new and more effective tools to fight cancer.

In recognition of Dr. Cobb's research achievements, she was elected to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences in 1974. She was a member of the National Science Board and was on the cover of a Special Edition of Time Magazine as Scientist of the Year.



Dr. Jewel Cobb was a dear friend and mentor, and a person whose memory warms my heart. I was fortunate to have her as a role model.

She gave her time unselfishly, sharing insights about the worlds of science and academia. Her eminence as a scientist and educator makes her a role model for us all.

I met her in 1974 at the Marine Biological Laboratory when I was in the Neurobiology course as part of an NIH program designed to increase participation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students. Jewel was invited to share information about her career in science. She went on to schedule weekly meetings to check our progress and provide support and guidance.

Jewel hosted a party each summer that many MBL scientists attended. She made a special effort to introduce me and my wife, Sylvia, to other scientists. This was one of the most memorable events each summer. It made it possible for me to meet well-known scientists whom I would not have had a chance to know otherwise. Jewel became a friend of the family and we met her family and friends. Her warmth and genuine caring spirit made spending time with her a delight.

Although Jewel served in significant administrative roles, she was most proud of her contributions to science and her mentorship of aspiring minority students. I look forward to seeing the street sign, "Jewel Cobb Road". It will be a welcome sight for the Black community that has not always been treated well, as described by Kenneth R. Manning in "Black Apollo of Science, The Life of Ernest Everett Just".

Dr. Jewell P. Cobb was a trailblazer who left a path for others to follow.

George M. Langford



"Jewel and Walter shared a love for science, research and teaching. Shirley and Jewel shared a love for their Jaguar sedans. We both loved sitting on her deck in the summer

overlooking the inlet on Bywater Road surrounded by friends of Jewel from all over the country. Delicious food, sparkling laughter and great conversations are embedded in our memories.

We knew Jewel in her many embodiments: faculty member and administrator at Douglass College/Rutgers, president at California State, and corporate board member in Atlanta, but our fondest memories are of being with her here on Cape Cod."

Walter and Shirley Massey

Woods Hole and Falmouth Memories

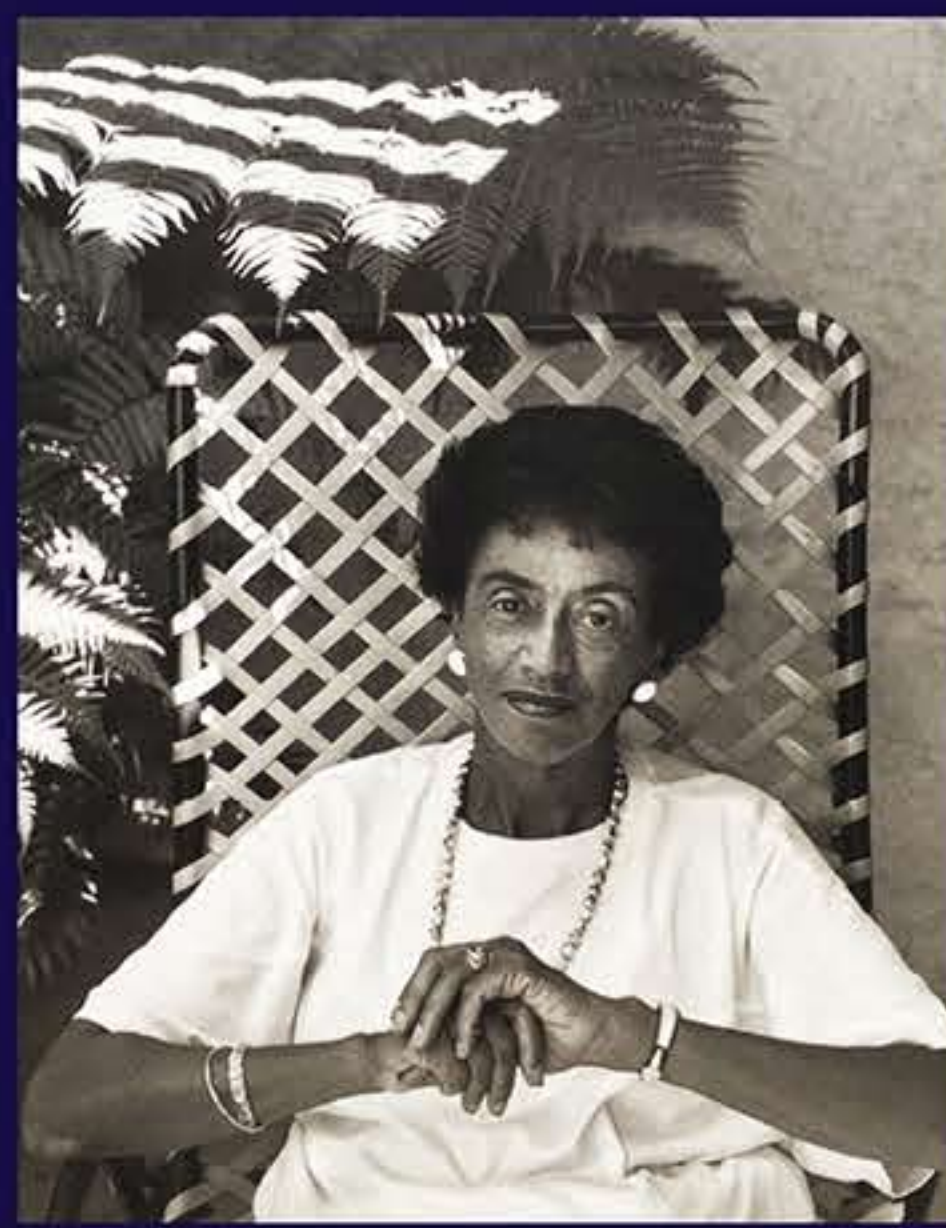


PHOTO BY BRIAN LANKER



Jewel was a dear friend of my mother, Irene Plactere Goldring. They were colleagues in the NYU Biology Department in the late 1940's and attended MBL summer courses in the same years as they earned their PhDs. Subsequently Jewel was on the faculty at Sarah Lawrence College and my mother at

Albert Einstein College of Medicine; both lived in Westchester County, NY where they remained close friends. Sometimes she stayed with us when visiting Woods Hole before she bought her house on Fresh River Lane. When her academic career took her to different locations, we visited her in New London at Connecticut College and at Douglass College in New Brunswick. During her time there she attended a Carnegie Hall concert I played as a member of the North Carolina Symphony. After my mother died of cancer in 1982, Jewel invited me to stay with her in California where she was by then president of Cal State Fullerton.

Jewel had a lovely warm and relaxed presence. I was always delighted to be in her company. I never heard her raise her voice or display an angry or agitated manner. Even when discussing important things that had not turned out as she would have liked, she spoke in calm tones, expressing objective criticism eloquently without using harsh words against those who had opposed her. I now reflect on how her ability to meet adversity with equanimity must have helped her early career as she persevered in the face of overt racial and gender discrimination.

Michael P. Goldring



At the MBL it is common to casually know other scientists and I was aware of Jewel Plummer Cobb, but did not know her well until Jewel and I sat next to each other at a dinner party at

the Walter Vincent house on F.R. Lillie road somewhere in the seventies or early eighties. Jewel radiated energy and we had delightful conversations about science and about how to help advance more women in science. We became friends and interacted as such over the years whenever she was in Woods Hole.

One memory is being invited to her house on Surf drive to celebrate that she had paid off her mortgage on that house. At that time, not many African American woman had a house in Falmouth on their own. I remember the brilliant smile as she burned the mortgage while standing on her deck surrounded by friends.

Jewel was a strong woman of color, who helped promote both women and African Americans in Science. But what I remember most is her warm, brilliant smile and friendship.

Nina Strømgren Allen



Jewel Cobb was my friend and neighbor for forty years. The summer season began for me when Jewel returned to her Surf Drive cottage on the Herring Run in Falmouth, a place she deeply loved. Throughout the summer, the gracious host drew to her cottage a steady stream of guests, friends from her growing up years in Chicago, colleagues from academia and the scientific community, and - always - me, her Falmouth neighbor.

She was a woman with flair and a zest for life. She enjoyed good food, the latest vividly-colored fashions, traveling the world, and, of course, the company of people. She enjoyed telling stories about herself, always with self-deprecating humor. I have wonderful memories of our conversations, of hearing accounts of her rich personal and professional experiences. Curious about the world, she was eager to hear about my life and my point of view on issues.

As intelligent as she was, she felt there was always more to learn; she actively sought interactions with experts in fields not her own, people she could learn from. Never was she bored or boring. Never was she without plans for the next party.

Jewel was my good friend and a memorable neighbor. I miss her very much, even after all these years.

Madeleine Marken

Jewel Plummer Cobb was born in Chicago, Illinois on January 17, 1924 to Frank V. and Carriebel (Cole) Plummer. She entered the University of Michigan in 1942, but, unsatisfied with segregated housing and other inequities for African American students, she transferred to Talladega College in Alabama where she graduated with a BA in biology in 1945.

Dr. Cobb was initially denied a fellowship for graduate study in biology at New York University because of her race. Following a personal interview however, she was granted the NYU fellowship and received a master's degree in 1947 and her PhD degree in cell physiology in 1950.

Subsequently, she held post-doctoral positions at the Harlem Hospital Cancer Research Foundation, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the National Cancer Foundation.

Dr. Cobb was appointed an independent investigator at the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) in 1949. She continued her association with MBL, Woods Hole and Falmouth for many decades. Dr. Cobb directed the tissue culture laboratory at the University of Illinois from 1952 to 1954. She continued her research as a faculty member at NYU from 1956 to 1960 and at Sarah Lawrence College from 1960 to 1969.

In 1969, she became Dean of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Zoology at Connecticut College. In 1976, she became Dean of Douglass College of Rutgers University, where she was also a Professor of Biological Sciences.

In 1981, Dr. Cobb was appointed President of California State University, Fullerton. She brought an emphasis on research and scholarship to the University and vastly improved campus facilities. Following retirement, she was named California State University Trustee Professor at California State University, Los Angeles.

Dr. Cobb was awarded twenty-two honorary degrees. She received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy of Sciences in 1993. In 2001, she was the first recipient of the Reginald Wilson Award for significant and noteworthy accomplishments in the area of diversity in higher education.

Throughout her career, Dr. Cobb worked tirelessly to provide programs, resources, and opportunities for women and minorities to enter the sciences and other white male-dominated fields.

Dr. Jewel Plummer Cobb died on January 1, 2017. She is survived by her son, Dr. R. Jonathan Cobb, daughter-in-law, Suzanne Douglas Cobb, and granddaughter, Jordan Cobb.

"Health care delivery is one of the tragedies still in America."

Jewel Plummer Cobb, in Brian Lanker, I Dream a World (1989)

"We have what I would call educational genocide. ... when I see more black students in the laboratories than I see on the football field, I'll be happy."

Jewel Plummer Cobb, in Brian Lanker, I Dream a World (1989)



Jewel Cobb Action Coalition

Dr. Cobb's courage and steadfast commitment to creating opportunities for women and people of color inspired the formation of the Jewel Cobb Action Coalition (JCAC).

Changing the name of Agassiz Road to Jewel Cobb Road was never expected to be an end in itself. All who participated knew that a new sign would signal continuing work against racism and for the fair, hospitable community we want.

The JCAC is dedicated to achieving a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for Woods Hole and the greater area of Falmouth. We seek collaborative efforts between residents, neighborhoods, and institutions to create a community that is welcoming to all.

