



James Emil Hansen, II

December 4, 1938 - August 27, 2025

James Emil Hansen, devoted husband, father, brother, uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather, friend, and historian, age 86, died peacefully on August 27, 2025, after a long struggle with Huntington's disease.

Jim was born in Teaneck, New Jersey, on December 4, 1938, the first child of Florence Kohl and Victor Clifford Hansen. He was a happy child, blessed by loving parents and family. His mother was a gifted pianist who could hear a song once and play it perfectly. He often referred to his father as the best person he had ever known. Jim excelled in both academics and athletics. He graduated from Middlebury College in 1960, majoring in history and lettering in track. In 1961 Jim enlisted in the Army Reserves and learned to be an excellent cook. He once helped make nearly 100 Thanksgiving turkeys, and that holiday in Fort Collins was an annual tradition at which he memorably demonstrated this expertise.

In 1962, he married his first wife, Jacqueline A. Ross, with whom he raised a son and daughter. He attended graduate school at the University of Denver and earned an M.A. (1965) and Ph.D. (1969) in history.

Jim's only professional job was at Colorado State University (CSU). He began on a temporary appointment in the history department in 1966 and retired as a full professor in 2003. A very dedicated, talented teacher, Jim taught the first

African-American history course in 1968. He created the first university archives, a necessary prerequisite to his first history of CSU—Democracy's College in the Centennial State (1977). Jim wrote two additional university histories, along with nine other books and countless scholarly articles and presentations. He also served on the Colorado Historical Records Advisory Board for 38 years, directed the Colorado Agricultural Archives for 22 years, and was acting university archivist for 4 years. In addition, Jim helped co-found a public history master's degree program where he mentored many students, always extending himself to make sure they would have good jobs upon graduation.

Jim was lovingly devoted and loyal to his family and friends. He encouraged his son Ross to take guitar lessons and spent many hours playing catch with him in the backyard. He tucked in his daughter Gayle at night with make believe stories with her as the heroine.

Following his divorce from his first wife, Jim married the love of his life, Nancy Elizabeth Downing, in October, 1986. They shared a remarkable array of values and interests. They both loved cooking, hiking, theater, and travel. They made numerous trips to national parks, Hawaii, Alaska, Great Britain, and other European countries. For more than 35 years they had season tickets to the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. They also enjoyed spectator sports, especially women's basketball and Broncos and Rockies games. Jim was a romantic person and unfailingly wrote poems and love letters to Nancy on every birthday, anniversary, and Valentine's Day.

He was an original participant in the faculty/staff noon hour program at Moby Arena where he enjoyed basketball and was an avid tennis player. After retiring, Jim also became a member of the Gaffers group composed of former history department faculty and students, which met to share common interests and memories.

Jim Hansen was a remarkable man. He possessed great integrity, curiosity, loyalty, kindness, and good humor; he was an exceptional writer. He will solely be missed by all knew him.

Jim is survived by his wife, Nancy, of 38 years, and her extended family; his sister, Gayle, and her extended family; his son, Ross Victor Hansen (Deneice Dyer); his daughter Gayle Jennifer Vecere (Philip) and five grandchildren-- Tanya Marie Vecere, Rebecca Lancaster (Jeff); Christina Goldberg (Aaron), Nicco Fili (Kaia Soufl), and Gabrielle Fili--and three great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Jackie; his parents; and many good friends.

A memorial service will be held at CSU Lory Student Center, University Ballroom, on Saturday, October 11, 2025, from 4-6 p.m. In lieu of flowers, memorials can be made to the Huntington Disease Society of America: <https://hdsa.org/get-involved/> or Pathways Care Center: <https://pathways-care.org/give-now/>

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

OCT **11**. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (MT)

Lory Student Center, University Ballroom (3rd Floor)
1101 Center Avenue Mall
Fort Collins, CO 80521

Tribute Wall

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“ My wife Colette and I were so sorry to learn just recently of the passing of Jim Hansen, my mentor and our friend. As a student in the CSU Public History Program (1980-1982), I saw firsthand Dr. Hansen’s devotion to the study of history and archives. He was an exceptional teacher and researcher and imparted to me all the necessary skills to undertake a successful career in the field of archives and public history. Dr. James E. Hansen II was a respected scholar who created wonderful learning opportunities for his many students in the program. His ongoing support and encouragement were unwavering and always greatly appreciated.

Although we didn’t stay in touch on a frequent basis over the years, we did, nonetheless, manage to catch up from time-to-time--through emails, letters, or in-person visits for lunch (sometimes with my wife, another CSU alum).

He will be sorely missed but always remembered by all of his family, friends, and colleagues who loved and respected him.

Thanks for everything, Jim.

Dennis D. Madden - October 10, 2025 at 05:27 PM