



Stella Martha Henderson

February 22, 1934 - February 19, 2024

Stella Martha Henderson died February 19th at her home in Alexandria, Va., after a quiet celebration of life in her last weeks, sharing moments with kids, grandkids, great grandkids, in-laws, and longtime friends. The stories, laughs, and a few tears – mostly in person, but also in phone calls and letters – looked a lot like the open-door, food’s-on-the-table welcome Gram Stella always lived by. But as she neared 90 and weakened, the visits were managed by her around-the-clock caregivers and companions, daughters Stella, Lorraine, and Diane.

The cause of death was breast cancer, which Gram Stella had lived through once before, in her mid-70s.

Stella was born on Feb. 22, 1934, in a house on a hillside in Turtle Creek, Pa. She arrived on George Washington’s birthday, and her first-generation Italian-American parents gave her the middle name Martha to honor the nation’s original first lady. She was the youngest of five children born to Mary and Joseph Ruggiero. But the home was run by her maternal grandmother, who had come from a seaside town in Italy, spoke no English, and made ends meet by turning part of the home into a corner store, and part into a boarding house for others seeking a foothold in the hills outside of Pittsburgh.

Stella and her mom and dad and brothers and sisters, along with a reluctant

Big Grandma, eventually moved into their own brick house built by Stella's father, himself an immigrant from southern Italy. Its open front porch overlooked the railroad lines and smokestacks from distant steel plants that for decades employed much of the region, including some in Gram Stella's family.

In high school she met a non-Italian boy from Braddock, a town near one of those steel mills, who would take the streetcar to visit. When he stayed a bit late, Grandpa Joe would bang on the floor and announce: "Scandinavian, go home!"

At 17 Stella left for nursing school at what was then Seton Hill College in Greensburg, Pa., and after graduation married the "Scandinavian," Frederick Mark Henderson, who had used the Air Force ROTC to attend Duquesne University. Their family grew as they traveled from bases in Texas, Ohio, and New York, with stops in Pittsburgh, before settling in Northern Virginia, where the last of their children were born.

Her husband, Fred, died in 2013, and her youngest child, Chris, in 2022. Gram Stella is survived by her children Mark, Lorraine (Pat), Tim (Ann), Greg (Juliana), Fred (Marietta), Diane (Toz), and Stella (Paul); grandchildren Sean, Ryan (Lillie), Dominick (Liz), Ciana (Gil), Capri, Roman (Teresa), Georgia, Jake, Amelia, Alexander, Isaiah, and Lucy; and great-grandchildren Michael, Emmeline, Leo, Carolina, and Luca.

Her brothers and sisters, Rose Cardamone, John Ruggiero, Joseph Ruggiero, and Helen DeStefano, have all passed away. But she stayed in the lives of many nephews, nieces, grandnephews, grandnieces, and other relatives, near-relatives, and dear friends.

When most of her own kids were grown Stella worked as a home healthcare

nurse for several patients, who became friends. And she was a regular and a volunteer at St. Lawrence Catholic Church for the last half century. She especially enjoyed bringing communion to the homebound.

Stella could often be found at a grandchild's lacrosse, or football, or soccer game, even the cold and rainy ones, and even when her eyesight was so bad she couldn't tell the teams apart. Or at a dance show, baptism, birthday gathering, whatever the occasion. Her faithfulness extended to friends – whose number somehow seemed to grow as the years passed.

If you found yourself in the Hayfield neighborhood in recent years and passed what looked like a small bundle of scarves wielding a pair of walking sticks and shuffling in the street while sporting outsized sunglasses, all under a loud hat, you saw Gram Stella. Her daily walk could take hours, with stops for coffee, or in summer the special delivery of loose-leaf lettuce from the backyard garden. At home she could be found sitting out front near the flowering white dogwood planted in memory of Pap, and the gnome garden memorial that celebrated Chris. Soaking up sun, and the sounds of the latest generation of the kids of Crawford Court.

Gram was on oxygen in the final six weeks as the cancer advanced, but stayed in her living room to be part of the mix. She made it to the kitchen table for dinner every night until her last. She was ready to go home, as she said, comfortable, at peace, and with the people and caregivers she wanted. Gram Stella had said her goodbyes, often with the simple words, “I love you,” and was looking forward to what's next.

If you'd like to do something in Gram Stella's honor she suggests a donation to the National Right to Life, the Glenmary Home Missioners, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, or St. Lawrence Catholic Church.

Previous Events

Viewing

FEB **25**. 2:00 PM - 9:00 PM (ET)

Jefferson Funeral Chapel
5755 Castlewellan Dr
Alexandria, VA 22315-5516
(703) 971-7400

Rosary/Prayer Service

FEB **25**. 5:00 PM (ET)

Jefferson Funeral Chapel
5755 Castlewellan Dr
Alexandria, VA 22315-5516
(703) 971-7400

Mass of Christian Burial

FEB **26**. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

St. Lawrence Catholic Church
6222 Franconia Road
Alexandria, VA 22310-2511
<https://stlawrencealex.org/>

Inurnment

FEB **28**. 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Quantico National Cemetery
18424 Joplin Rd
Triangle, VA 22172-1636
(703) 221-2183

Tribute Wall



“ Jefferson Funeral Chapel created a Tribute Video in memory of Stella Martha Henderson



Jefferson Funeral Chapel - February 23, 2024 at 04:09 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - March 03, 2024 at 02:12 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - March 03, 2024 at 02:10 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - March 03, 2024 at 02:09 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - March 03, 2024 at 02:08 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - March 03, 2024 at 02:07 PM

TK

“ *Stella reflected Jesus in such a beautiful way. In our many years in the military, with friends all over the world, I haven't met a more gentle, generous, loving, gracious woman. She welcomed me into the neighborhood and her home, as she did everyone. She knew how to laugh, how to love well, and how to always point me back to God and what He is doing. After we moved, she intentionally kept in touch. This tribute page is beautiful...she touched so many lives. She will be missed. I'm thankful she is "dancing in heaven with Jesus."*

Trish KIMMINAU - March 02, 2024 at 01:05 PM

CM

“ *I was very blessed as a child to have lived across the street from Mrs Henderson. She always made you feel so welcome. I will never forget the Popsicles she would make with jello in them! They were one of my favorite things. I also remember spending the night with Lorraine, and that particular night there was a hurricane warning! We were all in the living room and the next thing I knew she was sprinkling Holy water on all of us kids to keep us safe. She loved her family, and was one of the best Moms I have ever known. She will be missed by everyone. Praying for peace and comfort for the entire family.* 🙏

Carole (Laughlin) Mess - February 29, 2024 at 08:03 PM

GE

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Georgia - February 25, 2024 at 11:47 PM

KK

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



kim kelly - February 25, 2024 at 10:45 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



February 25, 2024 at 10:01 PM

BS

“ Barb & Doug Sellers planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Barb & Doug Sellers - February 25, 2024 at 10:01 PM

HG

“ The Gaillard family has been lucky to consider "Gram Stella" as a friend and neighbor for over 22 years. Gram always made everyone feel welcome in her home. When my kids were young, they were always excited to visit Gram's legendary toy room where my kids would enjoy the many toys Gram kept from her children. My son still remembers learning about Hess trucks while playing there. Meanwhile I would enjoy conversation and treats with Gram in the kitchen. Gram Stella will be deeply missed by all those whose lives she touched.

Heather Osterlund Gaillard

Heather Gaillard - February 25, 2024 at 07:26 PM

KH

“ Kelly H. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Kelly H. - February 25, 2024 at 02:04 PM



“ Mrs. Henderson was like a second mom to me growing up. I remember her door always open and how she welcomed me and everyone with open arms. She made a huge impact on my life, always smiling, laughing, and offering a hug. No matter how many people were at the house, she always made room for whoever wanted to be there. Sleepovers were so much fun and she always sprinkled Holy Water on our heads before bed. She is a blessing to me and will be in my heart forever.



Kelly (Laughlin) Higgison

Kelly Higgison - February 25, 2024 at 01:59 PM

PW

“ Penny W. planted a grove of 5 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Penny W. - February 25, 2024 at 11:40 AM

KL

“ Kathleen L. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Kathleen L. - February 25, 2024 at 09:15 AM

KK

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



kim kelly - February 24, 2024 at 06:22 PM

EK

“ Elizabeth K. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Elizabeth K. - February 24, 2024 at 04:18 PM

TF

“ *The Batson Family purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



The Batson Family - February 24, 2024 at 02:40 PM

TF

“ *The Batson Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.*

The Batson Family - February 24, 2024 at 02:40 PM

TP

“ *2 files added to the tribute wall*



Teresa Puglise - February 24, 2024 at 12:36 PM

CE

“ *the best grammie* ❤️



Ciana Enav - February 24, 2024 at 12:33 PM

CA

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



capri - February 24, 2024 at 12:32 PM

CE

“ ❤️❤️❤️



Ciana Enav - February 24, 2024 at 12:29 PM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 24, 2024 at 10:33 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 24, 2024 at 10:23 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 24, 2024 at 10:19 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum* was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



February 24, 2024 at 09:41 AM

TT

“ Tom & Beverly Tauke planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Tom & Beverly Tauke - February 24, 2024 at 09:41 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 24, 2024 at 08:44 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 24, 2024 at 08:43 AM

VB

“ *Stella Henderson was the best person I've ever known. My family normally referred to her as Mrs. Henderson, but she was mother, grandmother, godmother, inspiration and so much more.*

Her impact on me personally can not be overstated. She was my hero. As a high school graduation present she gave me what is still my favorite book, a book that taught me to love life. She initiated my coaching pursuit by volunteering me to coach soccer even though I had no coaching experience. She was a shining example of faith, love and caring for others, and she showed me what it meant to be welcoming and to quite literally have an open door policy.

Whether we were chatting around the kitchen table, on the back porch, or on the phone, she was able to focus on the positives and on the things to be thankful for, even in tough circumstances. I always thought, that if anyone had a direct line to God, it was her and she had line #1.

Life seems a little colder, gloomier and sadder now, but I will try to follow her example and focus on, and be thankful for the 40+ years of laughs, fond memories and lessons learned.

Love,

Vic, Ann, Sandy & Matt



Vic Batson - February 24, 2024 at 02:09 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 09:45 PM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 08:57 PM



“ Medium Dish Garden was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



February 23, 2024 at 05:09 PM

FR

“ From 2519 Haystack Road planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

From 2519 Haystack Road - February 23, 2024 at 05:09 PM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 04:42 PM

LT

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 04:29 PM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 04:26 PM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 04:09 PM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 03:57 PM

PO

“ Patricia and Tom O'Hara purchased the Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



Patricia and Tom O'Hara - February 23, 2024 at 02:23 PM

PO

“ Patricia and Tom O'Hara planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Patricia and Tom O'Hara - February 23, 2024 at 02:23 PM



“ *Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



February 23, 2024 at 11:27 AM



“ *The Niezgoda Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.*

The Niezgoda Family - February 23, 2024 at 11:27 AM



“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 11:11 AM



“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Lorraine Thompson - February 23, 2024 at 11:08 AM

BA

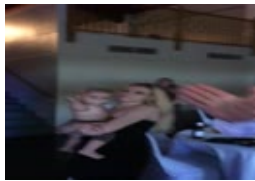
“ *My sincere condolences to the entire Henderson Family and Friends. Ma was like a little Ray of Sunshine filled with so much Life and Love for anyone she came in contact with. I have been so Blessed for 47 years to have known and been Loved by Ma. Bones*
(Robin) Anderson



Bones (Robin) Anderson - February 23, 2024 at 12:26 AM

LT

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Lorraine Thompson - February 22, 2024 at 09:43 PM

GR

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Greg - February 22, 2024 at 09:29 PM

GR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg - February 22, 2024 at 09:29 PM

GR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg - February 22, 2024 at 09:28 PM

GR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg - February 22, 2024 at 09:28 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - February 22, 2024 at 09:25 PM

GR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg - February 22, 2024 at 09:24 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - February 22, 2024 at 09:24 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - February 22, 2024 at 09:24 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - February 22, 2024 at 09:23 PM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 22, 2024 at 09:15 PM

ST

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



stella - February 22, 2024 at 09:13 PM

JM

“ From becoming neighbors on Haystack Road to being life long friends.



Jeannie (Watts) Mallory - February 22, 2024 at 07:38 PM

JM

Pictures: 1967, 1991, 2022

Jeannie (Watts) Mallory - February 22, 2024 at 09:24 PM

TK

“ The Sellers - Bruce, GiGi and Kids purchased the Rainbow Of Remembrance Spray for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



The Sellers - Bruce, GiGi and Kids - February 22, 2024 at 07:24 PM

TK

“ *The Sellers - Bruce, GiGi and Kids planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.*

The Sellers - Bruce, GiGi and Kids - February 22, 2024 at 07:24 PM

MT

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Marietta -2004 Family yearly beach trip - February 22, 2024 at 02:35 PM

LF

“ *Love always, The Puglise Family purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



Love always, The Puglise Family - February 22, 2024 at 02:34 PM



“ *Medium Dish Garden was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



February 22, 2024 at 02:13 PM

DF

“ Denise & JD Haschert and family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Denise & JD Haschert and family - February 22, 2024 at 02:13 PM

FR

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



fred - February 22, 2024 at 11:48 AM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



February 22, 2024 at 11:41 AM

BM

“ Bill and Cathy Marlin planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.

Bill and Cathy Marlin - February 22, 2024 at 11:41 AM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 22, 2024 at 11:16 AM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 22, 2024 at 11:15 AM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 22, 2024 at 11:15 AM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 22, 2024 at 11:15 AM

JS

“ *Fond memories of a dear friend. Always caring and a great hug.
Your memories will sustain you and bring you peace. Janet Schafer*

Janet Schafer - February 22, 2024 at 10:36 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 22, 2024 at 10:08 AM

WF

“ *With love from The Gruenwald Family purchased
the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Stella
Martha Henderson.*



With love from The Gruenwald Family - February 22, 2024 at
10:01 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 22, 2024 at 09:50 AM

LT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 22, 2024 at 09:38 AM

LT

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



Lorraine Thompson - February 22, 2024 at 09:33 AM

TF

“ The Laughlin Family purchased the Beautiful Heart Bouquet for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



The Laughlin Family - February 22, 2024 at 12:23 AM

TF

“ *The Laughlin Family planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.*

The Laughlin Family - February 22, 2024 at 12:23 AM

SF

“ *Sarah Hardy and Family. purchased the Rose Remembrance for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



Sarah Hardy and Family. - February 21, 2024 at 08:32 PM

GH

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:55 PM

GH

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:54 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:51 PM

GH

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:51 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:51 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:50 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:50 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:50 PM

EJ

“ Eric and Joanne purchased the Arrive in Style for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.



Eric and Joanne - February 21, 2024 at 07:49 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:46 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:45 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:44 PM

GH

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:44 PM

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:43 PM

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:43 PM

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:42 PM

GH

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:41 PM

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:41 PM

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:40 PM

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:40 PM

GH

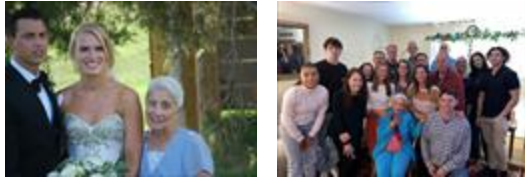
“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:39 PM

GH

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:39 PM

GH

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:37 PM

GH

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Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:05 PM

GH

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Greg Henderson - February 21, 2024 at 07:04 PM

FR

“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



fred - February 21, 2024 at 03:42 PM

FR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



fred - February 21, 2024 at 03:33 PM

FR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Fred - February 21, 2024 at 03:28 PM

JC

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall

Jefferson Funeral Chapel - February 21, 2024 at 03:11 PM

ST

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



stella - February 21, 2024 at 03:04 PM

GG

“ I love all of you. Tim thank you for calling this morning. Your family is beloved by our family. Your mom is good to the core. She loves Jesus Christ and her life is modeled after Him. I am all in with Stella for Jesus. So grateful for her and each of you.

Love, Glen Goodsell.

Sorry I won't be there Sunday from California, however my prayers and love will be with you.

Glen Goodsell - February 21, 2024 at 02:43 PM



“ *Heavenly Grace Spray was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



February 21, 2024 at 01:19 PM



“ *Sheehy Volkswagen & Subaru planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.*

Sheehy Volkswagen & Subaru - February 21, 2024 at 01:19 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



February 21, 2024 at 01:06 PM



“ *Love, Jim Scott & Lynn Gulick planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.*

Love, Jim Scott & Lynn Gulick - February 21, 2024 at 01:06 PM



“ *Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of Stella Martha Henderson.*



February 21, 2024 at 09:28 AM



“ *The Ciccotelli Family (Haystack Rd) planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Stella Martha Henderson.*

The Ciccotelli Family (Haystack Rd) - February 21, 2024 at 09:28 AM