

Mariada Bourgin

In the Nov. 18 editions of The Washington Post, the wrong nationality was given for Mariada C. Bourgin in a photo caption accompanying her obituary. She was American. (Published 11/23/2005)

Mariada C. Bourgin, 92, who organized a Washington-based radio network to be beamed into Cuba in the 1960s, died Nov. 10 at the Washington Home nursing facility in the District. She had Alzheimer's disease.

Mrs. Bourgin lived in Havana from 1946 to 1961 as the wife of an American businessman. She was assistant to the headmaster of the Ruston Academy, a private school that conducted classes in English and Spanish. She was in charge of admissions, administration and teacher-student relations.

A gregarious woman fluent in Spanish, she cultivated a wide circle of friends, particularly among diplomats, journalists, the Cuban intelligentsia and opponents of Fidel Castro, who seized control of the country in 1959.

After leaving Cuba early in 1961, Mrs. Bourgin was asked by CIA officials to use her contacts to launch a broadcasting service called Free Radio Cuba that would reach Cuban citizens on the island. As executive secretary of the service, she trained and supervised a staff of 17 Cuban emigres who broadcast a variety of news, commentary and musical programs. The radio service was run openly from a studio on H Street NW and broadcast primarily late at night over powerful radio stations in Florida and New Orleans.

According to an article published in the Chicago Daily News in 1966, Free Cuba Radio had 65 hours of programming a week, "designed to offset the propaganda barrage that Cubans receive from their own government-controlled radio and television stations."

In 1969, when the funding source of the broadcast service was revealed to be the CIA, Free Cuba Radio was forced off the air.

In addition to her work at the radio studio, Mrs. Bourgin also ran an outreach program that publicized its mission to colleges, the Organization of American States and other groups interested in Cuban affairs.

After Free Cuba Radio, Mrs. Bourgin became special assistant to the assistant secretary of state for education and cultural affairs.

She was in charge of the department's programs for minorities and women, seeking to increase their participation in international cultural exchanges.

She conducted meetings at colleges and with Indian tribal leaders, and established an exchange program between U.S. Indian reservations and Mexico's National Museum of Anthropology. She retired in the early 1970s.

Mrs. Bourgin was born in Woodlands, W.Va., and attended the University of Richmond.

For many years, she was at the center of a circle of Cuban exiles and others in Washington with an interest in the nation.

Her marriage to Walter E. Arensberg ended in divorce.

Survivors include her husband of 34 years, Simon Bourgin of Washington; two children from her first marriage, Ann Arensberg of Salisbury, Conn., and Walter W. Arensberg of Washington; and two grandchildren.

As a Cuban immigrant, Mariada C. Bourgin was vested in the radio service she started.

 **Comments**