

## Noted Educator T. Alexander Pond, Acting President at Two Universities, Dies at 85



WEST ARLINGTON, VT: Noted educator and physicist T. Alexander Pond, a visionary leader who led a distinguished and varied career of service to several major American universities, died peacefully at his home here on August 29<sup>th</sup>. He was 85.

Colleagues remembered “Alec” as “a truly great academic leader,<sup>1</sup>” “a consummate builder of academic excellence across all disciplines,<sup>2</sup>” and “a great man who accomplished great things.<sup>3</sup>” He is also fondly remembered by family and friends as a learned historian, connoisseur of classical music and Scotch whiskey, profligate punster, and dedicated family man whose wry, sardonic humor was at odds with his public persona.

Dr. Pond was instrumental in the creation of what is now Stony Brook University in New York. He was chairman of its Department of Physics from his arrival in 1962 until 1968, “transforming it from a small group with unexpressed aspirations to a graduate physics department with an international reputation.<sup>4</sup>” The recruitment of 1957 Nobel Laureate C.N. “Frank” Yang was a pivotal event in this evolution, and Dr. Pond’s authorship of the proposal that secured the Einstein Chair in Physics which Yang occupied was a crucial element.

Alec then turned his gifts to the challenges facing the entire University community. He was named Acting Executive Vice President of the State University of New York at Stony Brook in September of 1967, an appointment which became permanent a year later. During this tenure he served as Acting President on three occasions (1970, 1975-1976, 1978-1979) before returning to the Department of Physics as Leading Professor in 1980.

“The unrest in the late sixties was a real turning point for him,” his son, Ward, said. “I don’t think he thought a bullhorn to be among the accoutrements of his position, nor did he expect a 3000-student-strong “Mud Day” demonstration to pick his office carpet as the focus of its discontent. Dad was a faculty activist throughout his academic career; now he was on the other side of those conversations. His options and his obligations had changed.”

Upon the dedication of the site of the Stony Brook campus in 1960, the New York State Board of Regents gave it a mandate to become an institution that would “stand with the finest in the country.<sup>5</sup>” Stony Brook’s 2001 admission into the Association of American Universities, the 65-member invitation-only

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<sup>1</sup> [http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer\\_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831](http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831)

<sup>2</sup> [http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer\\_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831](http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831)

<sup>3</sup> Samuel L. Stanley email to Stony Brook campus community

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stonybrook.edu/sb/ataglace.shtml>

organization of the best research universities in North America, provides ample evidence that the institution Alec helped to build has successfully met that lofty aspiration.

After leaving Stony Brook in 1982, Dr. Pond joined Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, as its Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, where he was also University Professor of Physics. He served in these positions, and as Acting President for ten months (1989-90), until his retirement in 1997.

“[Alec] is credited with helping raise the profile of Rutgers from a good regional university to a world-class research institution,<sup>6</sup>” and “was instrumental in shaping state policy to make major improvements in science and technology programs at Rutgers and in higher education in New Jersey.”<sup>7</sup> Dr. Richard L. McCormick, President of Rutgers University, states “[his] achievements led directly to Rutgers’ admission to the Association of American Universities in 1989.”<sup>8</sup>

“Alec Pond will be remembered as a consummate builder of academic excellence across all disciplines,” Kenneth Breslauer, Vice President for Health Science Partnerships and Dean of the Division of Life Sciences in the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers, said. “At Stony Brook, he built its physics department into a nationally recognized program. At Rutgers, he transformed an entire university into a world-class research institution. His name is forever linked with Rutgers’ ascension to national and international prominence in research and scholarship.”<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Pond broke his retirement briefly in 1997 to serve as Acting Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey until June of 1998. He and his wife then split their time between residences in New Jersey and Vermont until relocating to Vermont full-time in 2004. After his wife’s passing, he enjoyed the pleasures of family life with his grandson, Simon, through his remaining years, days, and hours. “For the last five years, we have lived in a home full of stories, laughter, and joy,” his daughter, Nan, said. “My father deserved no less, and it has been our honor to be with him in the last stages of his life.”

Thomas Alexander Pond was born in Los Angeles, CA to Arthur Francis and Florence Alexander Pond on December 4, 1924. Upon his graduation from the public schools of San Marino, CA, he enrolled in Princeton University.

His studies at Princeton were interrupted by global events. Alec enlisted in the United States Naval Reserve as an Apprentice Seaman just after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In active duty lasting from July, 1943 through September, 1946, he rose to the rank of Ensign, retiring from active duty aboard the USS *Mount McKinley* as the Senior Ensign Afloat. He remained in the Naval Reserve until 1953, retiring as a Lieutenant.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer\\_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831](http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831)

<sup>7</sup> [http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer\\_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831](http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831)

<sup>8</sup> [http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer\\_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831](http://news.rutgers.edu/medrel/special-content/summer_2010/t-alexander-pond-for-20100831)

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After his tour of active duty near the Pacific Theater was complete, Alec returned to Princeton to complete his undergraduate work, earning his AB, with High Honors, in 1947. He continued his study at Princeton under Dr. Robert Dicke, earning his AM (1949) and PhD (1953), both in Physics.

Dr. Pond began his teaching career as an Instructor in Physics at Princeton, in 1951. In 1953, he became an Assistant Professor of Physics at Washington University of St. Louis, rising to the rank of Associate Professor at the time of his departure for Stony Brook in 1962. During this phase of his career, he published eight research papers in the fields of microwave spectroscopy, triplet positronium formation, positron annihilation processes, and parity conservation in weak and strong interactions. He also supervised a dozen graduate students in the preparation of their theses. While a Professor of Physics at Stony Brook, he was the Initial Principal Investigator for National Science Foundation support for the University's Nuclear Structure Laboratory.

"He had an uncanny ability to muster resources for those causes which he deemed foundational to future success," recalled Alec's son-in-law, Kevin Metcalfe. "He was a master at tactfully elaborating on existing plans. If a cyclotron was good, then a megacyclotron was better."

In addition to his proud membership in Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, Alec was member and/or director of over two dozen societies and boards throughout his career. Highlights of this career-spanning aspect of his service include his service as Member and Convener of the SUNY Stony Brook Faculty Executive Committee (1964-1967), Secretary of the Washington University Faculty Senate and member of its Executive Committee (1960-1962), and trustee of the University Research Association (1987-1990).

He also served on the Executive Committee of the ACLU's St. Louis chapter (1957-1958), Director of the Stony Brook Foundation and member of the Governing Board of the New York State Sea Grant Institute (both 1971-1981), member of the Board of Trustees of the Consortium for Scientific Computing (1984-1990; Vice Chairman 1987-1990), member of the Board of Overseers for the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (1987-1989), and Vice Chairman of the University Research Association Council of Presidents (1990). At various times he was Board Member or Trustee for the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, the New Jersey Marine Science Consortium, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, and the University Research Association.

Alec's sense of humor was legendary among friends and family. He would go far out of his way to play intricate practical jokes on people he cared for, and decades later would be reduced to paroxysms of laughter recalling them. It was a special thing to watch Alec bring himself to this state recalling a tale in which one's self was a target of his machinations. His punning was based primarily around place names; indeed, there were times Alec got lost because he knew only his "very punny" names for places, which didn't appear on his maps or in his guidebooks. His taste in movies was nothing if not eclectic; a devotee of high-brow drama and historical documentaries, his favorite movies were *Animal House* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

His daughter-in-law, Gale, recalls, "When we first met, he was "Dr. Pond," but he quickly became "Ol' Dad" – Ol' Dad with a unique sense of humor, who enjoyed eating pizza with his grandson, Simon. He

was a very dedicated family man who knew that the value of life was with his family, but who also found the time to give back to his community. He kept balance within the family. I miss him already.”

Alec was predeceased by his wife of forty-eight years, the former Barbara Eileen Newman, herself a dedicated supporter of graduate student communities at her husband’s universities, and by his older brother, Arthur F. Pond, Jr. (“Bud” to his family), a chemist. He is survived by two children, Arthur Phillip Ward (Gale), and Florence Alexandra (“Nan”) Pond (Kevin Metcalfe), four grandchildren (Crystal VanSkyhawk, Zachariah Pond, Kyle Vaught, Simon Metcalfe) and two great-grandchildren (Christopher VanSkyhawk, Alexander Asselin). He is also recalled with deep and abiding love by three nephews, George (Kathryn Whiting), James (Christy), and Thomas (Semie Rogers), a niece, Elizabeth (David Nelson), and an extended family of students and colleagues around the world.

A celebration of Alec’s life will be held at 2:00pm on Saturday, September 25, 2010 at the Wilburton Inn, 257 Wilburton Drive, Manchester, Vermont.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations in Alec’s memory to the Barbara N. Pond Memorial Fund in the Stony Brook Foundation, and the Department of Physics and Astronomy Chairman’s Fund at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.