

Dr. Henry Oliver White, M.D.

Doctor Henry “Hank” White, past president of the Friendship Sloop Society 1975-1976, passed away on September 15th. “Doc White” owned #59 Sarah Mead.

For nearly three decades, Dr. Henry Oliver White treated his patients with care, compassion, understanding, honesty and respect — an empathetic bedside manner was his priority — and the 6-foot 3-inch “gentle giant” worked tirelessly to help those he could not save die with dignity through the loving hand and spirit of medical and hospice caregivers.

Hank was proud that when his life was near the end, his advocacy, as well as the work of him and others, had made it possible for Midcoast residents to have a close-to-home, palliative care center that could work hand-in-hand with hospice to help ease the burden of families and their dying loved ones.

Thus, it was fitting, perhaps, that Hank spent his final days at Sussman House in Rockport, a place so dear to his heart and the reality of a vision he fostered for years as a practicing physician.

Hank, a general and thoracic surgeon who cared for thousands of patients at Camden Hospital, Knox General Hospital in Rockland, Penobscot Bay Medical Center in Rockport and Togus VA Medical Center in Augusta, died on Saturday, Sept. 15 at Sussman House after a long, valiant struggle with Parkinson’s Disease. He was 90.

His final days were filled with the sounds of his beloved classical music and unwavering love and support of his wife, Marian, and daughter, Sarah, as well as many caring hospice staff, volunteers and nurses.

After he arrived in the Midcoast in 1961, Hank lived mostly in Camden, and later, for a time, at the Samoset Village in Rockport, Bartlett Woods Retirement Community and Knox Center for Long Term Care, both in Rockland. He also resided in Venice, Fla. during a number of winters.

Hank is survived by his wife of 68 years, Marian, of Rockland; his children, Stephen White and his wife, Margaret, of Stonington, Conn., Jonathan White, and his wife, Jennifer, of Carmel, Calif., and Sarah Waltz, and her husband, Kenneth, of South Thomaston; his sister, Mary Bailey and her husband, Frank, of California; his brother, Dr. Robert White III and his wife, Dana Chavkin, of New Jersey; grandchildren Brandon Waltz, Parker White, Spencer White, Nathan White and Baker Charbonnet; and great-granddaughter, Audrey Josephine Waltz; as well as 13 nieces and nephews.

Hank was predeceased by a son, Bruce White, formerly of Bend, Ore.

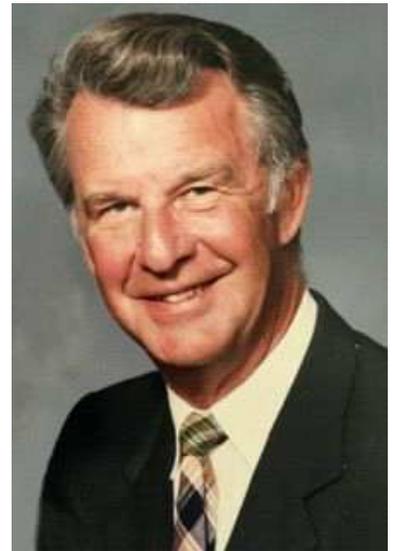
Hank was born on April 13, 1928 in Boston, Mass., the son of Dr. Robert R. White Jr. and Sarah Cornwell White. Hank grew up in East and West Orange, N.J. His lifework was stimulated by his father, a physician who specialized in obstetrics and gynecology, and two grandfathers, who were ministers.

“I felt it necessary to be of service to people and to be needed,” Hank said.

Hank graduated from West Orange High School and then Amherst College in 1949 and Boston University Medical School in 1953.

When at Amherst, he met his future wife, Marian Ritch, a student at Mount Holyoke College, in 1946. The two were married in 1950, at the end of Hank’s first year at medical school.

Following medical school, Hank served his internship at Rhode Island Hospital. “Having become committed to surgery at the end of medical school, I decided I should have the proper training to do only surgery,” he said.



Hank stayed at RIH for broad training in residency, which ended in 1961. At that point Hank and his family moved to Camden, where he practiced general and thoracic surgery at Camden Hospital and Knox General Hospital, and, starting in 1975, at Penobscot Bay Medical Center.

In December 1961, Hank performed the first lung resection in the Midcoast, a pneumonectomy, at Knox. He educated his nurses in post-op surgery care and started the special care unit at Knox. "I feel bringing my new skill to the area improved medical care here," Hank said.

Hank's interests and passions included medicine, music, sailing, gardening, tennis, Habitat for Humanity, travel, camping/trailering, genealogy, a universal healthcare system, hospice and end-of-life care.

Many of Hank's happiest moments were spent on the ocean, especially the waters of Penobscot Bay, in a sailboat. He was an avid and accomplished sailor, which was nurtured as a child on Martha's Vineyard. Hank passed down his love of sailing and the sea to his family.

Music always was an important part of Hank's life, beginning at church in childhood. During World War II, when adults had gone to war, Hank, a high school student, played percussion in the New Jersey Symphony and, later in college, he was a member of the Pioneer Valley Orchestra.

At Amherst, Hank and his roommate started the first post-war college band at the school. Hank sang in choruses throughout his life, and he and his wife sang in church choirs in Rhode Island, Kentucky, Florida and Camden. Hank and Marian toured abroad with the Presbyterian Church Choir of Venice, Fla., singing in Southern Europe, the Scandinavian capitols and in St. Petersburg, Russia. Hank also loved opera.

"I most enjoy classical music, choral, chamber and orchestral, and the more baroque the better," he said.

Hank, known for his deep voice, hearty laugh, sense of humor, attention to detail and occasional stubbornness, was heavily involved in his community, being on the boards, at one time or another, for the Camden Yacht Club, Penobscot Bay YMCA, Camden Snow Bowl, Bay Chamber Concerts, Penobscot Bay Medical Center, Penobscot Bay Foundation, Habitat for Humanity and hospice. He also was, at one time, president of the Friendship Sloop Society.

Hank, also called "Doc White" by many, considered himself a progressive. "If I could change one thing in our community, I would choose the absence of any form of bigotry, including for sexual preference, color, religion and gender. Nationally, I would choose medicare-for-all, a single-payer system, to include the more than 47 million in the USA who cannot afford medical insurance."

During his life, Hank traveled to nearly every state in the country, and made trips to South America, the Galapagos Islands, Africa, Scandinavia, Europe and Near-East.

Church was integral in Hank's life. He and Marian joined The First Congregational Church of Camden in 1961. He joined the church choir and served as the music chairman for 10 years. Hank was proud to be under the guidance of Lloyd Palmer, church organist and choir director.

"My best memory was singing under Lloyd," Hank said. "He also stimulated my starting to build a harpsichord, which I finished in 1968." The instrument was donated to the church in 2008.

Early in his life, Hank was instrumental in the planning and building of Penobscot Bay Medical Center and later in life in fundraising for Sussman House.

"I feel my greatest accomplishment was my very active role in the building of Penobscot Bay Medical Center," he said. "I was the first and only physician on the board and its committees, such as building, site selection and architect selection. It proved a regional hospital would work and was needed."

Hank's family thanks the staffs at Knox Center for Long Term Care and Sussman House — as well as the hospice staff — for their loving care of Hank in his final months.

A celebration of Hank's life will be on Saturday, Nov. 3 at 11 a.m. at The First Congregational Church of Camden. There will be a reception at the church following the service. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to The Sussman House, C/O Pen Bay Healthcare Foundation, 22 White Street, Rockland, Maine 04841; or to Maine Health Care at Home, 170 Pleasant Street, Rockland,

Maine 04841. To share a memory with Hank's family, please visit his book of Memories at www.bchfh.com.