

Paul Ferris Smith 1921 - 2014

by Jennifer Stone Gaines

When Paul Ferris Smith died last summer, he left both a great hole in our lives and a rich legacy at the Woods Hole Historical Museum.

Paul first came to Woods Hole in the 1940s as the Navy's liaison officer with the underwater explosives laboratory. In that role he also sailed aboard Atlantis, and was at the wheel on some thrilling passages. He was one of the founders of the Woods Hole Historical Collection and Museum and served many terms as president and as a steering committee member. Paul helped us to acquire and restore our buildings. He also inspired and helped to run many of our programs.

He was one of the team that first turned Bradley House into a museum: sanding the floors down to wood, designing exhibit panels, and painting the walls a new fresh white. It was he who conceived of the scale model of 1895 Woods Hole and led the team of model builders. He was responsible for acquiring, moving, and restoring the barn, now home to our Small Boat Museum. And it was he who first thought of forming the Boat Restoration Program, and found the right people to teach boat building. The Model Boat Show was also his brainchild. And always he supported and advised his wife, Mary Lou, in all her endeavors, from publications to gardening.



December 2013. Photo by Susan Pennington.

Paul was enthusiastic and helpful when we labored to bring worthy new ideas to fruition. He was almost always smiling. He loved sailing. He loved music. He was quietly elegant and wore a bow tie to every formal occasion. He was a delight to be with.

Indeed, he was a charismatic leader who shepherded the Woods Hole Historical Museum to the success it is today. He was above all a gentleman, a kind man full of vision for this Museum and the town, a man with boundless energy who could find the right people to help him carry his visions through to completion.

We will miss him.

Since writing the above, we have learned that Paul and Mary Lou left a magnificent bequest to the Museum. It was a complete surprise, but it certainly is in keeping with their generosity of spirit, time and talents, and devotion to the Woods Hole Historical Collection & Museum. The amount of their gift, almost half a million dollars, is breathtaking. It is, by far, the largest gift the Museum has ever received. In their passing they have ushered in yet another exciting chapter in the history of the Woods Hole Historical Museum.

We are, as we always have been, extremely grateful to them both.