

Richard P. Nickelsen, 89, Lewisburg



LEWISBURG — Richard P. Nickelsen, 89, of Lewisburg, passed away Sunday, Nov. 23, 2014, at Evangelical Community Hospital, Lewisburg. He was born Oct. 1, 1925, in Lynbrook, N.Y., a son of the late Karl and Olga (Holm) Nickelsen. On Nov. 18, 1950, he married the former Helen "Cindy" Beardsley who survives. Together they celebrated 64 years of marriage.

Richard graduated from Malverne, New York high school in 1943, where he acquired his love and knowledge of music by participating in the marching band. He received his undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College and his master's and Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University.

Surviving in addition to his wife are his children, Abby Nickelsen, of North Potomac, Md., Bruce Nickelsen and wife, Maria Uria-Nickelsen, of Upton, Mass., and Jillian Nickelsen and husband, Chuck Jensen, of Durango, Colo.; one grandson, Lucas Jae Nickelsen; and two cousins, John and Mildred Nickelsen of northern California.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by an uncle and aunt, Vagn and Magda Holm.

As a boy he became passionate about bird watching with a particular interest in the shore birds and those water birds that could be seen migrating off shore. With a cooperative father who would drop him off on the ocean-side

beaches of Long Island, he would walk for hours to a pre-arranged pick-up spot. In general his primary interest was in the birds who summered in the Arctic and the birds of prey such as hawks and falcons. Because of his knowledge of birds, friends urged him to join the Boy Scouts. He eventually became an Eagle Scout.

Following graduation from high school in Lynbrook, New York, he matriculated at Dartmouth College in the summer of 1943. He joined the Army for the balance of World War II in the Fall of 1943. Upon graduation from college in 1949 he was able to start his Arctic adventures with a summer job when he and a friend sailed out of Boston Harbor on a government ice-breaker to Devon Island in the Canadian Arctic. They were paid a dollar a day to dismantle a tower, which they later learned was part of the DEW Line system. The next summer he was in Alaska with a high school buddy where they worked mostly as carpenters but also as waiters. After three years of graduate school he was hired by the U.S. Geological Survey to work two summers in Alaska. As part of a 4-man team they spent three months mapping in the northern Alaska wilderness north of the Kuskokwim River. No cell phones.

After receiving his doctorate degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1953 he began his teaching career at Penn State in the Department of Mineral Industries. As the years passed he knew that he would be happier in a smaller liberal arts college where teaching undergraduates was considered most important. At the same time he would have the freedom to pursue his own research interests.

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