

Half Staff – John B. Harper

October 18, 2009

ROCKPORT — John B. Harper, 89, died peacefully Sunday morning, Oct. 18, 2009, at the Seacoast Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Gloucester following a long illness. He was born at the Presidio Hospital in San Francisco in 1920, spent his early years on several army posts, grew up in Troy, N.Y., and attended high school in Washington, D.C. As an army brat, he often said that he “was kept back twice, and double-promoted three times.” As an accelerated graduate of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), Class of 1942, he was trained in the then top-secret RADAR technology at MIT. He met his late wife, Eleanor (O’Neil) Harper, at a sponsored, chaperoned dance in Boston during his RADAR training.

John spent his overseas time during World War II in the Army Signal Corps installing RADAR units in bomber aircraft in the Burmese theatre. After the war, the family settled in Belmont, where he worked for various aerospace firms and volunteered as an auxiliary police officer who directed traffic for more than 15 years at the Thanksgiving Day football game with the occasional call-out for traffic duty at fires.

During the 50’s and 60’s, the family summered in Gloucester and Rockport and moved permanently to Rockport in 1972. As a volunteer in Rockport, John chaired Rockport Citizens for Action to help form the land use plan for the Town and later served as chair of the Finance Committee for many years. He also served as treasurer of the Sandy Bay Yacht Club.

A lifelong photographer, John was a member of the photographic division of the Rockport Art Association. During the retirement years from his day job, John photographed and cataloged every active large fishing vessel out of Gloucester along with critical documentation. His photograph of the Andrea Gail is the only known photograph of that vessel; the one used for the Perfect Storm. His photographic skills, especially in the black and white darkroom, led him to volunteer at the Peabody Essex Museum where he produced prints from antique glass negatives. These skills led him to serve as the photographer of a museum expedition to document the petroglyphs on Oahu.

John is survived by a daughter, Holly Yasaitis of Lexington; sons, Jack Harper of Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., Bill Harper of Leawood, Kan.; eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

ARRANGEMENTS: His funeral service will be held on Friday in the St. John’s Episcopal Church at 11 a.m. Relatives and friends are cordially invited to attend. In lieu of flowers, expressions of sympathy may be made in his memory to the St. John’s Episcopal Church, 48 Middle St., Gloucester, MA 01930, or the Peabody Essex Museum (www.pem.org), 161 Essex St., Salem, MA 01970. Arrangements are under the direction of the Pike-Grondin Funeral Home, 61 Middle St., Gloucester. For more information and to send online condolences, please visit www.grondinfuneralservices.com.