

A.W. Olsen Jr., Hotchkiss School Headmaster, 77

By Wolfgang Saxon

Aug. 7, 1998

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A. William Olsen Jr., whose more than two decades as headmaster of the Hotchkiss School brought coeducation and robust expansion to that preparatory boarding school in Lakeville, Conn., died July 30 at his home in Lakeville. He was 77.

The cause was cancer, the school reported.

Mr. Olsen was the sixth headmaster of Hotchkiss, from 1960 to 1981. The school, on 520 acres in the woodsy, rolling Berkshire Hills, was endowed in 1891 by Maria Hotchkiss to provide a solid, classic foundation for young men destined for Yale University.

Mr. Olsen, a firm believer in coeducation, introduced it at Hotchkiss in 1974 and opened the door for a student body that is now roughly half boys and half girls. Graduates today head for colleges all over the country, although the Ivy League continues to be the destination of choice.

Mr. Olsen's reputation led to associations with many other institutions in Connecticut. He was a trustee of the Wooster School, in Danbury; the Westover School, in Middlebury; the Town Hill School, in Salisbury, and the Forman School, in Litchfield, among others, and was a past president of the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools.

After leaving Hotchkiss, he worked for a number of years at the executive recruiting firm Russell Reynolds Associates in Manhattan. He became a managing director and pioneered the company's searches for nonprofit executives.

He was born in Tianjin, China, where his father, Albert W. Olsen, ran an import-export business. He graduated in 1939 from Hotchkiss and in 1943 from Yale, where he managed the football team and sang with the Whiffenpoofs. He also earned a master's degree in history at Columbia University in 1948.

He began to teach at Hotchkiss in 1945, spent five years at the Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts and returned to Hotchkiss in 1953 to teach English and work in admissions.

He is survived by his wife, Jean Rohrbach Olsen; a daughter, Liza O. Waters of Andover, Mass.; his twin, Elizabeth O. Horne, and another sister, Sally O. Davis, both of New London, N.H., and three grandchildren.

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 1998

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