



THE PLAIN DEALER

J. Neil Henderson, 83, chemist for Goodyear, dedicated birder

Tuesday, May 01, 2007

Alana Baranick
Plain Dealer Reporter

J. Neil Henderson, a retired Goodyear research chemist who died April 18 at age 83, co-edited an American Chemical Society publication titled "Polymerization reactors and processes" and penned a book about bird songs.

The former Hudson resident developed polymers for tire production for the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. in Akron before retiring as a section head in 1985. He was credited with 11 patents.

He and T.C. Bouton co-edited the Chemical Society symposium series in 1979.

Henderson's self-published "The Loon's Yodel: A Key to Bird Sounds in Northern Ohio" was a work of love.

"What he tried to do was to categorize bird songs into groups based on either the kinds of birds that produced them or based on their phonetic qualities," said Dan Melcher, president of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland. "It's a very hard thing to do with letters, but he made a scholarly effort, and I imagine he had a great time writing the book."

Henderson led spring bird walks at the society's Aurora Sanctuary for around 40 years.

"He was a very scholarly man," Melcher said. "He did a lot of research for us into our plant communities and the history of the ownership of the property that makes up the sanctuary."

He was born in Salmon Arm, British Columbia, Canada. He immigrated to the United States in 1949 and became a U.S. citizen in 1955.

"He started looking at loons on a lake in Canada, where he grew up," said his wife of 55 years, Almalee.

Between graduating with a degree in chemistry at the University of British Columbia and earning his doctorate in polymer chemistry at what is now Case Western Reserve University, Henderson spent two years studying sociology at the University of Chicago. During that time, he became seriously interested in birding and got his first binoculars.

Also as an adult, he learned to play bagpipes, which had fascinated him as a youngster. He performed with a piper band for a short time but preferred making music alone. He played at weddings and funerals and on his farm in Hudson.

Cows from a neighboring farm would sometimes come over to the fence when he played, his wife said.

He served several terms on the Hudson Tree Commission in the 1990s. He was a past vice president of the Hudson Genealogy Study Group, contributed articles to its newsletter and assisted fellow members with research in the archives room at the Hudson Library.

Henderson introduced bagpipe music to students at Hudson Montessori School, where he was in charge of

developing a wildlife garden in the 1960s.

He and his wife placed about three acres next to their Hudson home into a conservation easement under the protection of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. Henderson spent decades cultivating special plants on that section of land.

"That was sort of our back yard," his widow said. "He planted a lot of native trees and shrubs adding up to about 100 species."

The couple moved to Berkeley, Calif., a few years ago to be closer to their children.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:

abaranick@plained.com, 216-999-4828

J. Neil Henderson

1924-2007

Survivors: Wife, Almalee; sons, Blair of Chicago, Doug of Alameda, Calif., and Gordon of Los Angeles; daughter, Peggy Busher of Berkeley, Calif.; six grandchildren; and a sister.

Memorial gathering: 2 p.m. May 19, Berkeley Townhouse apartment complex, 2550 Dana St., Berkeley, Calif.

Contributions: Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, designated for its education center, 6505 Wilson Mills Road, Cleveland 44143-3404.

Arrangements: Bay Area Cremation and Funeral Services, Redwood City, Calif.

© 2007 The Plain Dealer

© 2007 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved.