

Obituary

HENRY POSNER JR., *Chairman of The Hawthorne Group*

Pittsburgh entrepreneur, benefactor of schools & hospitals, former CEO of Pittsburgh Outdoor Advertising and scientist with the Manhattan Project



Henry Posner Jr., a scientist with the Manhattan Project during World War II who amassed a business fortune and gave most of it away to benefit education and health care, died on Wednesday, March 23, 2011 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, surrounded by family and friends. He was 92 [*born Oct. 30, 1918*]. Long-time CEO of Pittsburgh Outdoor Advertising, following in his father's footsteps, he subsequently headed twenty-six other companies. At his death he was chairman of The Hawthorne Group, a private investment and management firm.

Posner frequently recounted how, after he failed promotion to the second grade in public school, his parents sent their only child to Shady Side Academy. For the remainder of his life he credited their sacrifice and Shady Side for his career in business. His father, who emigrated from Poland to the U.S. at 17 and became a successful businessman and an eminent collector of rare books, was Posner's model and hero. And without Shady Side, Posner maintained, he would have been digging ditches instead of managing companies. Class valedictorian at Shady Side, he went on to Princeton, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1941 with several awards and a degree in physical chemistry.

That fall as the U.S. was entering World War II, the National Defense Research Committee recruited him to work at Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University), then at Pittsburgh's Explosives Research Laboratory, where he helped develop a new solid fuel for rockets and jet-assisted take-off boosters for B-17 and B-29 bombers. In the course of one of his experiments he burned down the building. The

director of the Laboratory never reproached him, and Posner incorporated that example into his own business management style, recognizing that mistakes often accompany intense, hard work.

In 1944 Posner's former Princeton faculty advisor, John Turkevich, asked him to join the Manhattan Project, the secret government project at Columbia University that was developing the atomic bomb. When the War ended he returned to Pittsburgh to teach chemistry at the University of Pittsburgh, simultaneously earning a master's degree at the University's night school.

When he was 31 a friend told him there were some very pretty girls at the Oakland YWCA. For fifteen dollars each, the two became members, and at its next dance Posner met the woman who was to be his wife and life companion, the former Helen Virginia MacMurdo. He described her as the most beautiful girl he had ever met—athletic, intelligent, good-natured and completely unpretentious. After that initial meeting in 1949 they were together almost daily and married in 1953.

In 1946, while still teaching, he had begun working part-time at the Pittsburgh Outdoor Advertising Company, managed and partially owned by his father, Henry Posner, Sr. The company, which Posner joined as a full-time employee two years later, was to be the core of his business career. Using funds from the sale of a Baltimore outdoor advertising company they had acquired in 1952, Posner and his father bought full ownership of the Pittsburgh firm in 1956. Posner served as vice president, president, then chairman during the next 23 years, overseeing major growth through acquisitions and mergers. To diversify his interests, in 1979 he sold the company, while retaining a majority stake in the acquirer.

Posner had already begun to venture into other businesses. In 1966 he and two friends formed the Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company of Madison, Wis., and Rockford, Ill. The business prospered even beyond their most optimistic expectations, eventually returning more every four days than their total cash investment. More than 20 other business endeavors were to follow. With Pittsburgh Telecasting, formed in 1972 to buy Pittsburgh's Channel 53 out of bankruptcy, he entered an industry that was to engage him repeatedly.

In 1986 he and an associate, Tom Wright, formed The Hawthorne Group to manage their by-then proliferating interests. In addition to Pepsi-Cola Bottling, these came to include businesses in communications, health care and transportation, as well as real estate, including Hawthorne's Greentree Commons headquarters building, the Dominion Tower in downtown Pittsburgh and other properties in Pittsburgh, Florida, South Carolina and Georgia.

The exception to what he often said was an undeservedly fortunate life was the death in 2000 of his and Helen's youngest son, Rob. It was the saddest day of their lives, and they felt the loss every day thereafter.

By the time of Rob's death, the Posner family already had an extended history of charitable giving, primarily to

schools and healthcare institutions. Gifts had included a Center for Jewish Life at Princeton University, renovation of the main sanctuary of Pittsburgh's Rodef Shalom temple, Posner Hall at Carnegie Mellon University's graduate school of business, a reading room and a track at Shady Side Academy, and a child care center and playground for the Homewood-Brushton YWCA, among others.

In 2001, as a memorial to Rob, the Posners funded a major renovation of Pittsburgh's Shadyside Hospital, along with construction of state-of-the-art, minimally invasive surgical suites and creation of a pain treatment center. That gift was the largest in the hospital's history. The same year, also as a memorial to Rob, the Posners funded a playground and a therapeutic unit for children with Prader-Willi syndrome at Pittsburgh's Children's Institute. In 2004 they dedicated their second building at Carnegie Mellon University in memory of Posner's parents, a fine arts building to house his parents' extraordinary rare-book collection, which includes one of only three known original copies of the U.S. *Bill of Rights*, and provide state-of-the-art board facilities. Other gifts have included those to Shady Side Academy, where he was a life trustee, and, with son Henry III and daughter-in-law Anne Molloy, to Winchester Thurston School, for programs such as scholarships and construction of the new Upper School; to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, for a faculty chair in orthopaedic surgery and other programs; to more than eighteen institutions caring for elderly Jews in the former Soviet Union, a program administered and supported by Henry III and Anne Molloy; to a school for abandoned girls in Kashan, Iran; to a previously shuttered health clinic in a Bihari slum in Bangladesh; and to many others.

Despite numerous surgeries, Posner was physically active throughout his life, hiking the Appalachian Trail as a young man and later rounding Cape Horn and traveling to Bali and other remote spots. At 63 he and a friend sailed a forty-foot boat through a hurricane in the Atlantic. At 78 he climbed the Great Wall in China, and at 82, Machu Picchu in the Peruvian high Andes. At 84 and again at 85 he traveled with a group of fellow trustees from Carnegie Mellon University to Qatar on the Persian Gulf in connection with the construction of a CMU facility in Doha, and at 86, he traveled to Iran with an Iranian-American friend.



At dedication of Posner Center,
Carnegie Mellon University, May 2004

In addition to his wife Helen, Posner is survived by sons Henry III (Anne Molloy) of Pittsburgh, James of Hawaii, and Paul of San Antonio, Texas, and six grandchildren—Hannah, Ida, Agustin, Victoria, Eva and Matthew.

The Posner family will be present for visitation on Friday, March 25, 2011 from 12:00 to 2:00 PM at Rodef Shalom Congregation. Services will be held at Rodef Shalom Congregation, 4905 Fifth Avenue, in Pittsburgh's Shadyside section, on Friday, March 25, at 2:00 PM. Burial will be private in the family plot at Homewood Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, contributions are suggested to Rodef Shalom Congregation, Carnegie Mellon University, Princeton University, The Children's Institute, UPMC Shadyside Hospital, Shady Side Academy, or Winchester Thurston School.

Outline of Businesses

THE HAWTHORNE GROUP, a private investment and management company

chairman, 1986-present

The company's primary interests have been in outdoor advertising, television, radio, telecommunications, soft drink bottling, real estate, health care and railroads.

Primary Past Positions

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING

Pittsburgh Outdoor Advertising Company

vice president, 1946-52; president, 1956-79

Morton Outdoor Advertising Company (Baltimore)

president, 1952-56

Mid-State Advertising Corp. (Altoona, Pa.)

chairman, 1957-78

Gateway Outdoor Advertising Company

chairman, 1959-90

Ludwig Inc., (New Castle, Pa.)

president, 1960-79

Butler Advertising (Pa.)

president, 1961-79

Trans Ads, Inc. (Pittsburgh)

president, 1968-72

Skiview (Pittsburgh)

principal, 1985-90

SOFT-DRINK BOTTLING

Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company (Madison, Wisc.)

chairman, 1966-96

PepsiCola Bottling Company (Jackson, Miss.)

chairman, 1977-80

TELEVISION & RADIO

Pittsburgh Telecasting Inc. (Ch. 53)

chairman, 1973-78

Meridian Communications Corp

chairman, 1979-89

West Virginia Telecasting (Ch. 23)

chairman, 1982-88

Dayton Telecasting (Ch. 45)

chairman, 1984-88

REAL ESTATE

Inland Realty Corp

president, 1968-72

Five office buildings in Pittsburgh

principal

Johnson Square in Savannah, Ga.

principal

Real estate developments in Fla.

principal

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

American Mobilphone, Inc.

chairman, 1982-96

Maxicom Cellular, Inc.

chairman, 1982-86

Sun Paging

principal, 1991-96

PSWF Corporation

chairman, 1996-98

HEALTH CARE

Wexford Health Sources

principal, 1993-present (2007)

Bantry Group

principal, 1993-present (2007)

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