



1850 - 1946

Joshua Foster Owen died on June 11, 2014 in Chapel Hill, NC, less than a month after being diagnosed with brain cancer. He was 79. Born in Bridgeton, NJ on June 5, 1935 to Ada Foster and Percy Whitford Owen, Foster was a musician, a friend to many, a pioneer in historic preservation, a public servant, and a tireless advocate for the power of community to sustain, empower and educate.

Reared in Bridgeton and then known by his childhood nickname of Rocky, Foster began his musical career with the Bridgeton High School band playing his grandfather's double-belled E-Flat alto horn because his mother had it in the attic. He graduated from Bridgeton High School in 1952. Following graduation he worked for New Jersey Bell Telephone and began his lifetime avocation as a musician, singing and playing with barbershop quartets, jazz and pop combos and in numerous jam sessions throughout the region.

Foster met the love of his life, Jean Davis Owen, on a blind date in 1955. They were married February 7, 1960 and first visited Salisbury, NC during a honeymoon road trip. Impressed with the promise the town seemed to offer, Foster later enrolled at Catawba College, majoring in Business with a Minor in Music. While at Catawba, he sang with the Catawba College Choir and was active in student government. He graduated in 1964 and later served as the college's Admissions and Alumni Director.

In 1971, he accepted a post as Personnel Director and Treasurer for the City of Salisbury, the first of many positions he would hold during a thirty-one-year career in municipal government. Serving as Assistant City Manager beginning in 1986 until his retirement in 2002, Foster was known for his administrative versatility, overseeing construction projects, rehabilitating and managing city properties, organizing council retreats, and serving as an acting department head on several occasions.

Foster had a lifetime passion for arts and preservation organizations. An occasional actor and musician with Catawba's Blue Masque and later Piedmont Players, he was an active supporter of the Salisbury Symphony, Pops at the Post, the West Square Historic District, and the restoration of the historic Meroney Theatre, and served terms as an officer for the Historic Salisbury Foundation, the Waterworks Visual Arts Center, and the Meroney.

Most known for his talent as a banjo and tuba player, Foster performed with numerous Salisbury musical groups over the years including the Fulton Street Five, The Polka Dots, Resurrection Brass, the Trinity Oaks Singers, the Senior Class Barbershop Quartet and the St. John's Men's Chorus.

In 2008, Foster and Jean moved to the Carol Woods Retirement Community in Chapel Hill. During his years there he played and sang with the Carol Woods Jazz Ensemble, Franklin Street Jazz and Decatur Street Beat. He also remained an active member of Rotary International and he and Jean served as mentors to beginning medical students, an experience which led to the donation of Foster's body to the University of North Carolina School of Medicine.

Foster is survived by his wife Jean and by daughters, Susan Owen Atkinson and husband Alan, of Norman, OK and Mary Kathryn (Kate) Owen and husband Randy Williams, of Round Rock, TX; and by grandchildren Foster Owen Atkinson and Gwyneth Gordon Atkinson, also of Norman, OK. He is also survived by a sister, Virginia Owen Akers, of Bridgeton, by extended family and by legions of friends and former colleagues in Salisbury, Bridgeton, and Chapel Hill who loved him for his musicianship, his sense of humor and fun, and his willingness to lead, cheerlead, bolster and give wise counsel to family and friends in moments of challenge.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial contributions be made to Transitions Hospice Care of Raleigh or the Charles House fund, a facility offering adult day care services on the Carol Woods campus, or a charity of your choice.

A celebration of Foster's life is planned for Friday afternoon, October 17 at 2:00 in Lewis Hall, First Presbyterian Church, Salisbury. Other celebrations will be held at Carol Woods in mid-September and in Marlboro, New Jersey in early August.

Order #: 2680609  
Class: 005 - OBITUARIES  
AdTaker: CAROLYN  
Customer: OWEN, JEAN

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