

Obituary

Ardis H. Nier, 1921–2009

Ardis Hovland Nier died on December 16, 2009. Ardis was a great friend of the Meteoritical Society and endowed its Nier Prize in celebration of the remarkable contributions of Alfred Nier to meteorite research. She very much enjoyed meeting many interesting and friendly people at the society's meetings. She was by nature curious, intelligent, and good spirited, and she tried to find humor and optimism in whatever situation or condition she faced throughout her 88 years.

Ardis Lucille Hovland was born on September 21, 1921 and raised in the small town of Climax in northern Minnesota. She was musically talented and worked as a singer after graduating from high school. Shortly after WWII, she chose a more secure occupation in what she found to be a congenial social environment in the physics department (later the School of Physics and Astronomy) at the University of Minnesota. She became one of the key secretaries and for decades helped make the organization a friendly community as well as an efficient research and educational center. This was a place where major advances in mass spectrometry were made and exciting and innovative investigations on meteorites were carried out.

In 1969 Ardis married Al Nier; it was her first and his second marriage. They enjoyed travel and spending time at their lake cabin while both still worked. After her retirement, Ardis was very active in the university women's club, especially its scholarship program, and in her church. Al continued an active research career despite multiple "retirements," mostly in name only. The speaker who was invited to talk at his retirement party found that the state legislature had rescinded the rule requiring Al's retirement and the great big "retirement cake" had to be re-labeled just before the party!

In later years, the Meteoritical Society became a larger part of the life of Al and Ardis. In addition to playing a major role in developing modern mass spectrometry, Al had been involved in a wide range of geophysical, astrophysical, and chemical physics research throughout his career. This included work in the 1950s and 1960s on the analysis of gasses in iron meteorites produced by cosmic ray interactions.



Ardis Nier and prize winners, 2009.

Meteoritics was an area in which he could do significant work with the modest resources still available to him after "retirement." He particularly enjoyed meeting young researchers and speaking with them about their work. He found the Meteoritical Society to be full of interesting and open young scientists. The atmosphere of the meetings was quite conducive to the exchange of ideas and new data. They were much smaller than the "megalopolis-scale" meetings that appear to characterize much of the activity of larger scientific societies. Ardis enjoyed seeing old friends and making new ones at these gatherings. She had a great sense of humor. Many years ago, a package was delivered to one of us (G. J. W.) containing a friendly note from Ardis and Al with a T-shirt. It had illustrations of the official bird and bug of the State of Minnesota — a loon and a tick. The shirt is still worn.

After Al Nier's tragic death in 1994, Ardis determined that one appropriate memorial for him would be to establish a prize for younger scientists in the area of meteoritics, and she provided an endowment for this award. It was announced at the Washington meeting in 1995 that the society had agreed to establish and administer the Alfred O. Nier Prize.

The prize has been awarded annually since the meeting in Berlin in 1996 and Ardis was present on most of those occasions. She continued to include the

society's meetings in her active life. She liked to meet each winner and to appear in the middle of a photograph of all the winners of the prize in attendance at the banquet each year. She missed a few meetings in recent years due to health problems, but she attended and enjoyed the meeting in Nancy in 2009.

Ardis also endowed the Nier Lectureship in the Department of Geology and Geophysics of the University of Minnesota and strongly supported the Nier Scholarships in the School of Physics and Astronomy. She was a significant supporter of several other charitable, cultural, and educational organizations as well.

Despite successfully traveling to France and Germany for the Nancy meeting, Ardis felt a serious reduction in her stamina and strength over the summer and autumn. She scheduled a medical procedure and

planned to resume her busy schedule the next day. However, sudden internal abdominal bleeding took her life before she regained consciousness.

Ardis provided everyone with a model of cheerful perseverance, humor, wisdom, and loving kindness. She was an inspiration to all who knew her well. She is survived by her stepdaughter Janet Marx, stepson Keith Nier, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and other relatives.

The Nier Prize continues, and many who knew her feel it became as much a memorial to Ardis Nier as to Alfred Nier. It is a significant distinction for meteoriticists in the early stages of their developing careers.

Keith A. Nier and G. J. Wasserburg
