

Robert Spink Davis, advocate for children and education, corporate attorney, and civic leader died Saturday at Miriam Hospital. He lived in Providence and spent summers in Bristol. He was 85.

Spink led a distinguished career for more than 43 years with the Providence law firm of Edwards and Angell where he headed the corporate department and chaired the executive committee. Spink served on the boards of Citizens Bank and Narragansett Capital. He was active in the American Bar Association, a fellow of the Rhode Island Bar Foundation, and he was responsible for redrafting major portions of the Rhode Island Corporate Statutes. Upon retirement, managing partner Deming Sherman noted, "Spink was instrumental in building Edwards and Angell. He is without peer in his field in Providence. I have referred to him as the soul of the firm."

Spink was dedicated to the cause of improving education for children. When appointed to the Board of Governors for Higher Education in 1992, Governor Sundlun called him a "renaissance man" and noted "his commitment to excellence in education and his longstanding dedication to community." In 1995 Governor Almond appointed Spink to serve as chairman of the Children's Crusade for Higher Education, where he spent five years leading the cause he cared for so deeply.

Spink was Chairman of the Board at the Providence Athenaeum, which recognized him and his wife in 2003 with the Stephen Hopkins award. He served as Chairman of the Board of Roger Williams Hospital, where Davis Hall is named in his honor. He was a director at Rhode Island Common Cause. He also served as a director of the Herreshoff Marine Museum in Bristol. Spink first forayed into civic and charitable causes as a director of the YMCA, where he was instrumental in opening the East Side branch off Hope Street in the 1950s.

A boyhood student of Moses Brown School in Providence, Spink later graduated from Phillips Academy, Andover in 1938. He liked to say "I went in with the hurricane and out with the war," having earned his bachelor's degree from Yale College in 1942 before entering the Navy. He received his law degree from Harvard University in 1948.

While serving as a lieutenant in the US Navy during World War II, he spent the duration of his service aboard the USS Concord in the Pacific Ocean. His ship fired some of the last shots of the war before accepting the surrender of Northern Japan.

Spink loved the water and he was a lifelong sailor. A spry, energetic man throughout his years, Spink walked to work most days; he enjoyed tennis, and he often began summer days with a swim along Poppasquash Point in Bristol. In his seventies, he took up paddling his ocean kayak to Hog Island. Together with his wife, Spink traveled to all seven continents and to over 75 countries around the world, often pursuing his love of nature and photography. He was a member of the Hope Club, the Bristol Yacht Club, the Agawam Hunt Club, and he was a founding member of the Walker's Island Yacht Club.

Spink was preceded in death by an infant brother, John Franklin Davis (d. 1925), and by his infant daughter, Hope Spink Davis (d. 1950).

Spink was the keeper of many cherished family traditions. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Bertha Beth (Freeman) Davis, their two children, Geoffrey B. Davis of Providence and Dimity Davis Reiss of Bristol, and a brother, Foster B. Davis, Jr. of

Providence. Also surviving are four grandchildren, Angus Davis of Providence, Kendall Reiss of Bristol, Felicity Davis of Providence, Foster Davis of Providence, and a step-grandson, Charles Weinberg of Providence and Barrington.

Since 1935, he was a member of Providence's Central Congregational Church, where a memorial service will be held this Friday at noon. A reception will follow at the Hope Club on Benevolent Street. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Providence Athenaeum at 251 Benefit Street in Providence, RI 02903.