

H-R December 14, 1995

Clair Patterson

Clair C. Patterson, who won the prestigious Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement in 1995, died suddenly Tuesday, Dec. 5, at his home in The Sea Ranch, Calif. He had suffered from asthma.

A memorial service will be held at the California Institute of Technology in January. The family held private services Dec. 7 in Santa Rosa, Calif. Burial will be in Mitchellville in the spring.

A 1943 graduate of Grinnell College, Patterson, 73, was emeritus professor of geochemistry at the California Institute of Technology.

According to a news release from the institute's Office of Media Relations, he had "a remarkable talent for finding the most important scientific problems and then solving them." He was best known for his determination of the age of the earth and solar system and for his pioneering work on lead pollution.

A native of Des Moines, he earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry at Grinnell. He continued to study chemistry at the University of Iowa, where he earned his master's degree in 1944, and at the University of Chicago, where he completed his doctorate in 1951. He received an honorary doctorate of science from Grinnell in 1972 and was the college's Danforth lecturer in 1988.

Surviving are his wife, Lorna, a 1943 Grinnell alumna; one brother, Paul, a 1942 Grinnell alumnus; one sister, Patricia Stuart of Altoona; four children, all Grinnell graduates: Susan McCleary of Crawfordsville, Camero of San Diego, Calif., Charles of Powell, Ohio, and Claire Maia Keister of Minneapolis, Minn.; and three grandchildren.