Adelbert Ames III, MD, 97, of Marlboro, Vermont, died on May 31st, surrounded by family.

Del was born in Boston to Fanny Vose Hazen Ames and Adelbert Ames, son of the Civil War general of the same name. He and his sister Priscilla grew up in Hanover, New Hampshire. Del fished, hunted, and watched birds. He skied at the nation’s first rope tow in Woodstock, VT, and skied in his first Hochgebirge Challenge Cup race at Cannon Mountain, NH, at 13.

Del moved from Hanover High School to Exeter Academy, to Harvard, and on to Harvard Medical School. He served in the Army doing research in Alaska on how to keep troops alive in extremely cold conditions, and completed a medical residency at Presbyterian Hospital in New York.

Del’s career in medical research on brain function was at the Massachusetts General Hospital, where he helped establish the tradition of basic research that endures to this day. He retired as the Charles Anthony Pappas Professor of Neuroscience at Harvard Medical School. Del innovated the study of brain physiology by using retinal tissue to explore how the brain functions and by first showing that the retina could be kept alive outside the body for precise study. He invented an artificial cerebrospinal fluid – the Ames medium – that scientists use to this day. He also explored how brain tissue damage could be avoided by reducing the body’s temperature, a function-saving therapy now widely used in neurology and neurosurgery.

While at Harvard, Del was president of the gliding club, and was captain of the Harvard Ski Team in 1941. In 1946, he was a charter member of the Drifters Ski Club, formed to obtain “some kind of lodging in Northern New England from which such sports as skiing, drinking, canoeing, hunting, fishing and gliding could be pursued.” Drifters originally stayed in Dundee, NH, before moving to a new lodge in Jackson, NH, in 1955, where the club continues to thrive. Del entered many Masters ski races during his retirement. He gave up racing in the Hochgebirge Challenge Cup race at age 88, after a seventy-five year run that was interrupted only by WW II. Del was last seen on cross-country skis when he was 96. Ever an outdoorsman, he hunted partridges and woodcock and fly fished throughout his life.

In 1948 Del married Judith Quentin Derby of Oyster Bay, NY, and they eventually moved to Concord, MA to raise three children: Mark, Judith, and David Ames. In September of 1973 Del lost Judith to cancer. Two years later he married Mary Faith (Polly) Wilson, and became step-father to her six children: T Hunter, Nora, Nancy, Roger, Dawes, and Patricia Wilson.

In the early 1980s Del and Polly began moving into retirement at Polly's family's country home, Jenckes Farm in Marlboro, VT. Del and Polly purchased contiguous woodlands and established the Jenckes Foundation as a conservation reserve, protecting significant back land
and historic cellar holes in Marlboro and Halifax. The Foundation will persist as a legacy for wildlife to the benefit of townspeople and students at Marlboro College.

In retirement, Del continued writing and reviewing journal articles, publishing his last one in 2011. He created a network of cross-country ski trails, and worked with Polly to plant countless annuals, perennials, and trees. He expanded and mowed fields, cleared views of solstice and equinox sunsets, battled beavers, and inadvertently fed otters from his trout pond. “Grandel” introduced a new generation to the joys of fishing.

During their later years, Polly began to suffer from memory loss, and Del served as her primary caregiver and cheerleader. During their forty-three years of marriage, Del and Polly modeled a love and tenderness that continues to inspire us all.

Del's inquisitive mind, his delight in life, in people and in nature was contagious. He touched both family and friends deeply with his ability to listen and honor.

The family is tremendously grateful to the many friends and caregivers who supported Del and Polly during Del’s decline. Longtime family friend Rebecca Gembarowski provided loving support for the last six years. Along with his wife and children, Del leaves four daughters-in-law, four sons-in-law, eleven grandchildren, five great grandchildren, and many devoted nieces, nephews and cousins. He was predeceased by his sister Priscilla Anderson.

A memorial service to honor Del Ames will be held at All Souls Church, 29 South Street, West Brattleboro, Vermont on Friday, August 10th at 3 pm. Please join us.