David R. Weber ‘65

David Ryder Weber, scholar and retiree from a long career teaching English at Phillips Exeter Academy in NH, died at home Friday evening, April 21st, from an apparent heart attack. He had spent the day pleasantly, having a leisurely brunch with a long-time friend, chatting with his wife of 58 years, Ilona, about it afterwards, then going out for his afternoon walk.

He was born in Greenwich Village, New York City, June 25, 1943, to Dorothy Davenport Ryder (Weber) Towey and Louis A. Weber. When he was 6, his stepfather became ill and the family returned to Connecticut, where he grew up in his grandfather’s large Victorian home in Danbury. A graduate of Dartmouth College, class of 1965, he earned a master’s degree in English at Columbia, then transferred to Cornell to be out of the city and pursue doctoral studies. Deep immersion in anti-Vietnam War activities brought him to end his studies with another master’s degree, and take a position at Phillips Exeter Academy, where he taught for 47 years.

From his research at Cornell he compiled an anthology of American writings, titled Civil

Disobedience in America, published in 1978. For a year prior to his death he had been

researching the life and legacy of Thomas Paul, an African American minister who was born near Exeter in 1773. Paul became the first minister to lead the First African Baptist Church in America, now known as the African Meeting House and a National Historic Site. Weber hoped to increase understanding of African American culture in New England during the 1700s and 1800s through this research.

At Exeter, he and a colleague began a weekly Meditation series, and a writing program for students to learn the art of writing in a way that expressed and examined their own personal spiritual roots. A man of expansive heart and deep dedication to social change, Weber spent years working with Marriage Equality in New Hampshire, which culminated in a legislative victory for same sex marriage in 2010.

He was deeply involved with Ryder Farm, one of the oldest organic family farms on the East Coast. The farm is located on the Ryder family homestead in Brewster, NY, with the original farm house from 1795 still maintained and used by family. Since 2011 the farm has housed an arts non-profit, SPACE, which offers residencies to playwrights, visual artists, and other innovators and activists.

He was also a two-term Trustee of Dartmouth College, a member for several years of the Exeter Police Community Advisory Committee, the Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Exeter, the Racial Unity Team of Exeter, the board of Exeter LitFest, the local Southeast Land Trust (SELT) Advisory Committee and he served many Phillips Exeter graduates as a primary reader and editor of their books, some of them well-known authors, some scholars in areas of social justice to which Weber was committed, and some writers of op-eds for leading papers.

A dedicated birder, Weber led bird walks for faculty and students each spring. He loved people deeply and lunched with a myriad of friends on a regular basis, to stay in touch with their pursuits in writing and climate justice, gender justice, and racial justice, and to share work of his own. He leaves his wife of 58 years, Ilona (Wagner) Weber, a daughter Anya and her husband George Stericker, a half-brother and half-sister, Daniel and Rachel, innumerable cousins, dear friends from childhood, and a community of cherished colleagues and former students.