Harold H. Haskin, 87,
Delaware Bay biologist

By Kristin E. Holmes
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Harold H. Haskin, 87, a scientist, a retired Rutgers University professor, and an internationally recognized expert on oysters and clams, died of pneumonia Sunday at his home in Cape May Court House.

As a scientist, Mr. Haskin was known for his research on oyster biology. His breeding program produced disease-resistant oysters and helped stop the massive deaths of the shellfish in and around the Delaware Bay.

As a teacher, Mr. Haskin was known for combining the classroom and the outdoors. He took students on frequent field trips, regardless of the weather. They affectionately called him "Hurricane Hal."

His fascination with oysters began with the summer he spent on a houseboat named Cynthia, a floating lab where he worked with his college professor and mentor, famed oyster biologist Thurlow "T.C." Nelson.

"Oysters are a fascinating animal because they are a keystone organism," said Susan Ford of the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory on the Delaware Bay, which Rutgers renamed for its longtime director in 1991. "The large oyster reefs provide home, shelter and food for a whole range of other organisms. Dr. Haskin got pulled in."

Mr. Haskin, born in Niagara Falls, N.Y., lost both parents to the influenza epidemic of 1918. He was adopted by a family friend and moved to Salem, where he was raised.

He graduated from Rutgers in 1936 and joined the faculty 10 years later. By then, he had received a doctorate from Harvard University, served in the Army during World War II, and married Peggy Blackmer. The couple spent their honeymoon on the Cynthia.

MSX. In the early 1960s, Mr. Haskin developed a strain of oysters resistant to the disease. That strain is still used to breed oysters along the Northeast coast.

His research provided data that government agencies used to improve fisheries management, and, as a result, he was tapped to advise several state government agencies.

His awards include honors from the New Jersey Governor's Office, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Water Resources Association of the Delaware River Basin.

In addition to his wife, Mr. Haskin is survived by son Frederick James Haskin; daughters Kathleen, Jean Hole, Elizabeth and Mary D.; and four grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held in the fall.

Memorial donations may be made to the Harold Haskin Fisherman's Forum, Rutgers University Foundation, 7 College Ave., New Brunswick, N.J. 08901.