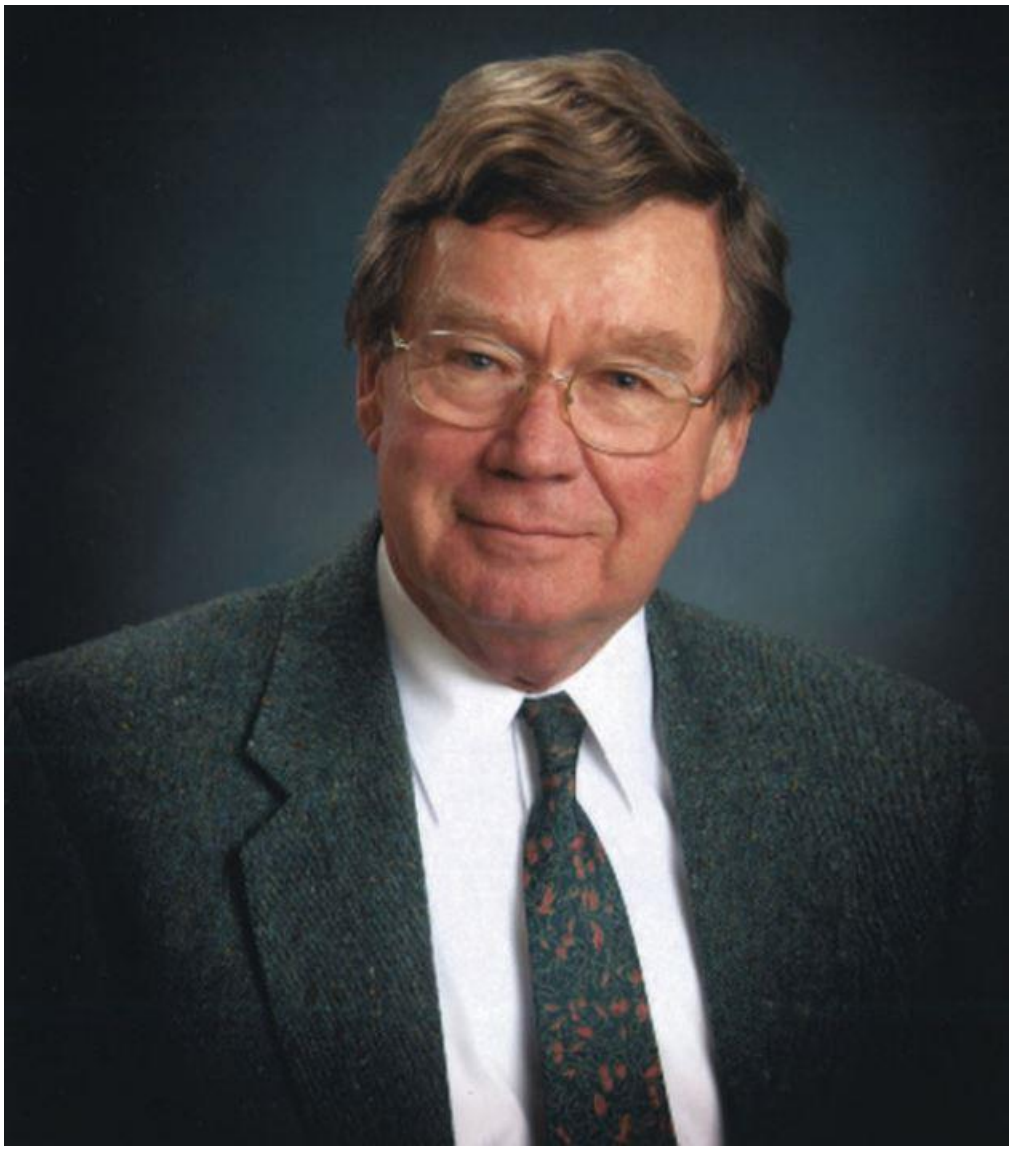

Bernier Mayo, longtime St. Johnsbury Academy headmaster, passed away Sunday evening, Aug. 14, 2016 at the age of 78.

He was born in St. Johnsbury, Vermont on Feb. 24, 1938, one of seven children born to Francis and Dometille (Bernier) Mayo. He was predeceased by two sisters, Elaine Driscoll and Anne Warren Brill, as well by a brother, Frederick Mayo.

Bernier's childhood recollections were abundant, engaging, and made clear that from an early age, he was a most enterprising man about town. While in first grade, he secured his first job as paper boy; he liked to tell of the Christmas when he first had the earnings to purchase gifts for his family, buying hair cream for his oldest brother and copies of the same comic book for

everyone else. Throughout his school years, Bernier worked as busboy, bellhop, movie ticket seller, bowling-pin setter— these and countless odd neighborhood and family jobs forged his lifelong respect for hard and honest work done well.

In 1952, Bernier entered St. Johnsbury Academy, beginning the connection that shaped his life for the next 64 years. He often reflected upon his sense that the Academy made him a serious person. He spoke of teachers who brought him alive to ideas, and who by virtue of treating him with attention and expectation, made him see himself as having the power and freedom to do good in the world. Bernier believed that this was the job of education: to make young people understand themselves in this way.

Having graduated from SJA in 1956, Bernier attended the University of Vermont, as well as seminary at the University of Montreal, receiving a B.A. in English from UVM, and later, an M.A. from the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury. In 1964, he returned to the hometown he loved; it was the year that propelled him into all the rest, as first he became an English teacher at St. Johnsbury Academy, and then he met Jeanette Pike, the petite but formidable junior high English teacher down the hill.

Bernier and Jeanette married in 1965. When he became headmaster at the School of the Holy Child on Long Island in 1972, they left St. Johnsbury with the shared dream and plan of returning. In the years that followed, they immersed themselves in a succession of schools and communities with much energy. Bernier's leadership was re-invigorating everywhere he served. In 1976, the Mayos moved to northern Virginia, where Bernier served as superintendent of schools for the archdiocese of Arlington. Knowing that he needed to complement his understanding of private and parochial schools with experience in public school administration, in 1978 Bernier accepted a position as superintendent of schools in Gouverneur, NY. During this time, Bernier also commenced study to become a deacon in the Catholic church. It was a sustained, intense, and faith-filled commitment, rewarded by his ordination in 1983.

Bernier and Jeanette were elated by his appointment as headmaster of St. Johnsbury Academy. His years in this role and as community leader were vivid and rich, fueled by his desire to give back to the places of his origin. He brought the strength of his intellect, personality, and work ethic to many things in addition to the Academy: spearheading the effort to build a facility for CALEX, writing the town plan, co-founding Good Shepherd Catholic School, serving in the Vermont State Senate, and sustaining St. Paul's School in Barton as principal in its final year are some of these accomplishments.

In the summer of 2013, Bernier was diagnosed with lung cancer and underwent related surgery. One day later, he suffered a major stroke, resulting in paralysis of his left side. The stroke altered his life greatly but never extinguished his spirit. He lived most of his final three years at the Pines Rehabilitation Center in Lyndon. Bernier adored Jeanette's daily visits, and he remained most attentive to all she read to him from the Caledonian-Record. In conversations during these years, he expressed gratitude and wonder for the life he'd been given to lead.

The Reverend Mr. Bernier L. Mayo is survived by his dear wife Jeanette; daughter Erin Mayo and husband Peter Gurnis of Fryeburg, Maine, and grandchildren Musa, Maeve, and Gunnar; daughter Darcy Dugas and husband Scott of Guilford, Conn., and grandchildren Andre, Molly, and Parker; two brothers, John and Michael Mayo of St. Johnsbury; sister Marceline Nadeau of Lancaster, N.H.; nieces, nephews, and their extended families.

Visiting hours will be held at the Sayles Funeral Home Thursday evening 5-8 p.m. Funeral services will be held in St. Johnsbury at St. John the Evangelist Church on Main St. this Friday, Aug. 19 beginning at 10:30 a.m. Selected speakers will begin the service prior to the Mass beginning at 11 a.m. with Fr. Bernard Gaudreau, celebrant.

Memorial contributions could be directed to either: St. Johnsbury Academy, 1000 Main Street, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819; or Good Shepherd School Foundation, P.O. Box 146, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819.

St. Johnsbury Academy has lost a figurehead with the passing of beloved longtime Headmaster Bernier Mayo. Mr. Mayo graduated from the Academy in 1956 and rejoined the school as an English teacher in 1964. He became English department chair in 1968 and continued teaching English throughout his time as Headmaster, which spanned twenty years from July 1981 until June 2001. After his retirement, he served on the Academy Board of Trustees from 2002 through 2016.

Headmaster Tom Lovett, a great friend of Mr. Mayo, expressed what so many have felt upon hearing of his death:

Bernier was my mentor and friend—a kind of father-figure to me. He hired me, trained me, and encouraged me. We were partners on so many projects for the town of St. Johnsbury, the Academy, and St. John the Evangelist Church (in particular Good Shepherd Catholic

School). His generosity and his love of thetown and its people was inspiring, and everything he did was rooted in a deep Catholic Christian faith. Even when he was struck down with cancer and a severe stroke, his faith showed through; "There are lots of ways to experience Jesus," he said.

For the Academy, he initiated a new era of prosperity and growth. The boarding program, the AP program, the community outreach, new buildings, new endowed funds for those in need and for professional development, new levels of annual giving—these are just some of the lasting marks of his legacy here. He was the driving force behind many of our planned gifts – many of which continue to be some of our largest gifts to the school.

When we write the history of the Academy, he will go down as one of its greatest headmasters and one of its most beloved teachers. He was headmaster for the longest consecutive term (20 years—Colby did 22, but he took a break in between), and his time as a teacher here stretches back to the 1960's. Counting his time as a student here as well, he has been associated with the Academy for over 60 years—over a third of its history! As a Board member, he was able to provide invaluable institutional history and was a great support to me, personally. He was a fierce defender of our independence, a strong believer in the excellence of the Academy brand, and a stalwart advocate for its role in the local community.

More than anything, though, he loved the people of the Academy and the towns that it served. He especially loved young people. As a teacher, he drove the ski busses; as a headmaster, he chaperoned trips; as a Trustee, he rarely missed an event. Alumni near and far remember Bernier either as a classmate, teacher,

parent, or headmaster. Community members remember him as fellow board member, deacon, legislator, counselor, and friend. He made lasting connections wherever he went. This loss will travel across the world.
I am sure I speak for countless members of the Academy community when I say I will miss him terribly, and my thoughts and prayers are with him and his family today. I have much to say about the love that marks that family and how much I hope they know of our love for them at this time, but this is probably not the right place for me to express those sentiments.

Funeral services will take place this Friday, August 19, at 10:30 a.m. at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in St. Johnsbury with a reception directly following at the Mayo Center on the Academy campus. Calling hours will be on Thursday, August 18, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Sayles Funeral Home.