

Retiring president:

# Gross leaves Old Queens for final time

By WILLIAM P. BARRETT

Tuesday, August 31, 1971, dawned brightly over Old Queens, the administrative center of Rutgers University, but the sunny atmosphere was not reflected in the faces of its employees.

It was business as usual, with one exception. The day was Mason Gross' last as president of the University.

Gross, who is revered by faculty, staff, and students alike, announced his resignation in July, 1970, with very little explanation, except to observe that by his last day in office he would have completed 25 years with the University, half of them, 12 1/2 years, as president. To a philosopher, which Gross was to the end, sensible ending points are highly important.

There were no doubt many things which contributed to his decision: dubious relations with the state government, a serious funding problem, an increase in student unrest, a desire for more time to himself and his wife, his age (60), and perhaps his own health. Whether he became tired of the job or not is difficult to determine, but one thing was certain—the University was not tired of Gross.

During his last year, he experienced a display of affection rarely shown to college administrators, especially by students. Every time he spoke in public, there was sure to be a standing ovation. One of the few big-college presidents to teach while in office, his class registration usually closed early.

### Sports fan

An enthusiastic sports supporter (he once helped to coach the crew at Rutgers), Gross attended most football games and would often talk to students at halftime. For a president of a 35,000— student university, he was very accessible.

Gross had asked that any public fanfare be kept to a minimum. This, of course, was ignored, although only two testimonial dinners were held.

The last issue of the *Rutgers Newsletter*, the University publication for faculty and staff, was devoted to Gross, with anecdotes and observations about him by friends and acquaintances. Gross knew nothing about (and probably would have vetoed) the preparation of the edition, which was, as the lead story proclaimed, "In Cheerful Tribute To Mason Gross."

But in Queens on August 31, the people were sad. "He was so nice, so pleasant to work with," said his secretary, Elsie Hahnenfeld, who later that day would answer the phone, "Good afternoon, Dr. Gross's office," for the final time.

[The next day, her greeting was, "Good morning, president's office." She explained, "People might be confused if they didn't know there was a new president, so I didn't use the name." Asked whether she would use it eventually, she smiled. "I don't know," she said. "I just don't know."]

Mrs. Hahnenfeld had been Gross's secretary precisely five years to the day, and it was evident she was fond of her boss. "I'm really going to miss him," she said.

Her sentiments were typical in the building.

### The tie

Gross arrived at his office late in the morning, dressed in a beige coat and his omnipresent red-and-black striped Rutgers tie.

Part of Gross's image centered on his Rutgers tie. Nobody had ever seen him without it, and he confirmed later in the day that he had worn one every day of his presidency. But he also dispelled a rumor that he had worn the same one all 12 1/2 years. "I must have 35 of them," he observed. "One class gave me two dozen."

"One of my future problems," continued the

retiring president, "will be deciding what color tie to put on each day."

[The next day, his successor wore a red-and-blue tie, thus breaking tradition. "I'll wear red-and-black ties," he said, "but I like to wear other ones, too."]

Several people in Queens had observations about Gross's tie that last day. "Anyone that could wear a red-and-black tie every day and still dress sharp had to be great," said one resident. "There isn't a whole lot that goes with red and black."

Another had a more somber observation. "He'll be wearing," said the sage, "that damn tie at his viewing."

Gross was not at his desk long before an organized, impromptu farewell gathering materialized. Led by George Kramer, vice provost and dean of admissions, 40 or so University friends of Gross came into his office merely to say goodbye. "It was sort of an occupation of Queens," said Karl Metzger, long-time secretary of the University.

"Word got around that he would be here for the last time," said George Holsten, director of public relations, "and some of us just wanted to say goodbye. It was all very informal. We just came in, shook hands, and said goodbye."

Asked whether any eyes were wet, Metzger said, "I turned my back. I didn't look too closely, but I'm sure there were, because mine were a little moist."

Gross was then taken to lunch at Woodlawn by members of his cabinet, including Metzger, Holsten, Kramer, Vice Presidents Malcolm Talbot, John Swink, and HENRY Winkler, University lobbyist Arnold Zucker, Director of Alumni Relations Irving Pawa, Helen Stewart, associate director of the University Press, and Eagleton Institute head Donald Herzberg, the host.

Holsten made Gross an honorary member of the public relation department (something he had been *de facto* if not *de jure* for a long time), and Zucker presented him with a tape containing excerpts from Gross's many speeches and public appearances.

Then he was given a copy of volume 1, number 1, of the *Newsletter* (1949), on the back page of which is a story about the philosophy course he taught. "It was a very pleasant, yet sad occasion," said Metzger.

After lunch, Gross returned to Queens, passing the blank directory of offices and officers in the entranceway. It has been removed to change the name at the top and would reappear without 'Mason W. Gross' on it the next day.

In his last interview as president, Gross was careful not to criticize anybody. He declined, as he did all year, to take a parting shot at the state of its officials, commenting only that his biggest disappointment was the state's wresting of the Medical School away from the University.

Other than moving into his house in Rumson, he



Ben Jaagov

# for final time



Ben Jaagov

professed no firm future plans. "I'll do whatever I like, he said, refusing to comment on whether he would write or teach, "but as little as possible," noting that he has commitments to several boards and foundations. Among others, he is a trustee of Vassar. Gross didn't try to judge the successes of his administration. "Maybe in a year I can do that," he said, "but not now."

He said he wanted to be at the inauguration of his successor, but only as an observer, and not to deliver a speech. "I just want to be there to watch," he declared.

The moustached president had noted earlier in the summer when presented with his ninth honorary degree, this one from Rutgers, that he would be able to return to the campus as an alumnus. He earned his regular degrees from Cambridge and Harvard.

When the interview, which didn't last very long, was over, Gross left his office. Often he walked the halls of Queens to drop in on the various offices and see how things were functioning. Now he did it again, but for the last time.

Starting with the offices on the top floor, he said goodbye to everybody in the building, administrators and secretaries alike. It wasn't very drawn out or dramatic, yet emotional.

"When he came into my office to say goodbye," said Winkler, "he didn't say very much. He inquired about my wife, who has been sick for a long time, said 'I'll see you,' shook my hand, and left. As usual, he was concerned about others."

One secretary said, "He just stuck his head in here, said 'Au revoir,' and left, like that."

"I almost felt like crying," said another.

The goodbyes finished, he returned to his office, bare of pictures, paintings, and books, to pick up a box containing the few personal items he had not already removed. Tucking it under his arm, he said goodbye to Mrs. Hahnenfeld and the other people in his reception room as he left.

Heading down the hall for the steps, he saw Metzger talking to a reporter. "Goodbye," he said natively as he opened the door to the steps. The time was 3:32 p.m., when the man in the Rutgers tie left Old Queens in an official capacity for the last time.

"That's it," Metzger murmured to the reporter as they watched Gross go down the steps. "It's all over. He's gone."