Edward Sulzberger; N.Y. realty patriarch, S. Main redeveloper

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NEW YORK — Edward Sulzberger, a patriarch of the New York real estate industry who was chairman of the board and former president of Sulzberger-Rolfe, died Thursday night at his home in Manhattan. He was 80 years old.

Sulzberger, a trustee of Brown University, served as president of Sulzberger-Rolfe for 33 years. Under his guidance it became a diversified real-estate organization involved in building management, cooperative conversions and sales, leasing, appraisal and urban redevelopment.

He was a vigorous spokesman for the industry and was often in the public eye. In 1967 he handled negotiations with the city during a building service strike.

A critic of rent control, he once predicted that "New York's housing will become a massive and growing slum," if rent control continued.

His real estate company was prominent in the 1970s redevelopment of South Main Street, once a rundown factory district that now is dotted with upscale shops and condominiums, including the 76-unit Plantations project that the company built.

Sulzberger became involved in the redevelopment project at the urging of the late John Nicholas Brown. He later said that he was disappointed for business reasons, and remarked that if he could do it all over again he wouldn't.

Sulzberger was born in a brownstone on East 72d Street in Manhattan. His father, Myron Sulzberger, was a lawyer who served as a Municipal Court judge for 17 years.

Sulzberger attended DeWitt Clinton High School and the Dwight School, and graduated in 1929 from Brown University, where he met his wife, the former Maye Dorfman, who attended Pembroke College.

His first venture after graduation was as a partner in a baking business. But an allergy to flour sent him into real estate, and by 1942 he was managing 50 buildings.

Ten years later he acquired the firm of Joseph H. Nassoit, changing its name in 1966 to Sulzberger-Rolfe. He joined his own name with that of his business partner and son-in-law, N. Anthony Rolfe, who succeeded him as president this year.

Sulzberger was appointed in 1982 by President Reagan to the board of directors of the National Corporation for Housing Partnerships. The board was created to increase the participation of private industry in the construction of housing for low- and moderate-income families.

Sulzberger also served as a former president of the Metropolitan Fair Rent Committee and the Association for Government-Assisted Housing. He was honorary chairman of the New York Rent Stabilization Committee and was a member of the Realty Foundation of New York.

He was a trustee of Brown University and Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Miss. He actively participated in more than 30 civic groups, including B'nai B'rith, United Jewish Appeal and the Flying Doctors in Kenya. In 1986, he established the Edward Sulzberger Foundation, a philanthropic fund.

Sulzberger was an avid golfer and was a member and former president of the Quaker Ridge Golf Club in Scarsdale, N.Y. He also cherished a rare collection of 125 handmade figures representing English and Scottish regiments.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by a daughter, Susan S. Rolfe of Manhattan; three grandchildren, and two great-grandsons.

SULZBERGER, EDWARD