MEMORIAL RESOLUTION FOR SAMUEL A. THORN

Samuel Alfred Thorn, Age eighty one, a teacher of music and biology for thirty years, died from complications following pneumonia on February 2, 1974. He was born in Becker, Minnesota and completed his secondary schooling at Becker High School. From 1911 to 1916 he studied at the State Teachers College, St. Cloud, Minnesota, where he majored in music and biology, and received the bachelor’s degree in 1917. Except for a period of eighteen months in military service, Mr. Thorn spent the years 1917 to 1922 as a high school teacher of music in St. Paul, Minnesota and Gary, Indiana. In 1922 he joined the staff of the Milwaukee Normal School, one of the predecessors of UWM, where he taught music and biology until his retirement in 1948.

The teaching of both music and biology courses in an institution of higher education may seem unusual, but those of us who knew Sam were aware of his diverse interests and the energy with which he encouraged college students to develop avocational pursuits. He believed that people should not only enjoy music but should participate in musical activities. To set an example, he devoted a considerable amount of time to extra-curricular musical work. Christmas caroling was an annual all-college activity which he directed for many years. Several hundred students participated in this event, which included a parade on Downer Avenue, with the students carrying lanterns and singing for the residents of the east side area and for persons in such institutions as St. Mary’s Hospital, the Protestant Home for the Aged and St. Rose’s Orphanage. He also organized a men’s chorus which consisted of young men who were not enrolled in the Music Department but who were interested in singing simply for the fun of doing so. This group not only gave concerts throughout the Milwaukee area but made two trips to the west coast. The highlights of these trips were mountain climbing ventures in Colorado, with impromptu singing on the upper slopes. He continued to direct both caroling and the men’s chorus until 1942 when world war II disrupted most campus extra-curricular activities.

In the 1930’s Sam Thorn expanded his activities to include the sciences. He organized an Astronomy Club which had an active telescope making project and evening programs on astronomical observations. From 1933 to 1938, he undertook graduate work at Marquette University and in 1938 earned the M.S. degree in Biology. For a time after 1940 he taught both music and biology courses, but in 1944 he became a full-time biology instructor. He was particularly interested in developing nature study programs. He organized an ecological-oriented course entitled, "Plant and Animal Relationships," which became popular with students pursuing teaching careers in the field of Elementary Education. He also believed that it was not beneath the dignity of a college teacher to work with children in the elementary grades. A frequent visitor to the Campus Elementary School, Sam discussed nature study with the children and took them on hikes and field trips for firsthand educational experiences. Other children were introduced to nature study through a column on nature activities which he wrote for a number of years for the Milwaukee Journal. Sam even found time for a hobby of his own—bird banding. He was granted a license for this work in 1939 and from that date until he retired he banded thousands of birds, mostly in Downer Woods.
In retirement, Sam Thorn found time for his varied interests. For eight years he traveled throughout the western and southwestern United States, with temporary residences in Oregon, Florida, Arizona, California and Arkansas. During this time he wrote ten books, several with a former colleague—Irene Harbeck, on nature activities for the elementary grades. Several of these, including three pre-primers, were widely used in elementary schools throughout the country. While in Florida, he taught biology courses for two semesters at Lakeland College; he was asked to remain as a faculty member, but he decided to pursue other hobbies. He and his wife finally decided to settle permanently in Mountain Home, Arkansas, where they designed their own home. Activities there included participation in the local garden club, the American Legion, where he served as chaplain, and in various programs of the local Presbyterian church. In each of these organizations he always led the community singing, which was an integral part of their programs.

Mr. Thorn is survived by his wife and several nieces and nephews. To his wife, Vera, his colleagues and friends at UWM extend their sincere sympathy and their appreciation for his services to this University.

Ernest Bellis
Neal Billings
Peter Salamun
Alvin Throne
Ralph Tillemann