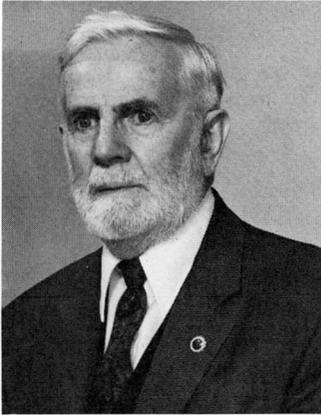


Memorial to William Taylor Thom, Jr.

1891–1979

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William Taylor Thom was born in Roanoke, Virginia, June 9, 1891. He died in Ashland, Oregon, May 22, 1979 and was buried in Sandy Spring, Maryland.

Taylor, as he preferred to be called, moved at the age of one to the farm of his maternal grandparents with his mother and older sister. The farm was in Sandy Spring, Maryland. It was there, in that then rural area some 20 miles north of the White House, that Taylor began his life-long studies of natural history under the tutelage of his grandfather. He found what he later called the "open sesame to adventure." A birthright member of The Society of Friends, he found himself in a community of Friends, and this, along with his early formal schooling in Quaker schools, gave him a direction that lasted throughout his life.

Professor Thom was graduated from Western High School in Washington, D.C., in 1909. During his high school years, he served as a page boy in the U.S. Senate (1906–07). His undergraduate degree came from Washington and Lee University in 1913 and his doctorate from the Johns Hopkins University in 1917. Washington and Lee awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Science in 1936.

His professional career began after graduation from high school; he worked as a surveyor for the District of Columbia Water Company 1909–1910. In 1912 he began an apprenticeship as a summer employee with the United States Geological Survey and continued in this capacity through his graduate student years. Looking back at this early "work-study" program, he found that the Geological Survey provided him with actual demonstration of objective and method and that the excellent library at The Johns Hopkins University proved a fine place for background material and theory. He was less impressed with his lecture courses and described them as being "interesting studies of faculty foibles and personalities rather than gems of great enlightenment." Full-time employment with the Geological Survey began in 1917. He early became involved with the geology of fuels, and he led for a while, the planning section of the United States Fuel Administration. Later he became chief of the coal section of the Geological Survey, and then chief of its fuels section (oil, gas, and coal). In 1927 Taylor joined the faculty of the Department of Geology at Princeton University and served as Chairman of the Department of Geological Engineering from 1941 to 1955. In 1937 he became the fourth incumbent of the Blair Professorship of Geology, the second-oldest endowed chair in the University. He retired from the active faculty in 1956. The Thom Prize in Geological Engineering was established in his honor and is awarded annually to the outstanding graduating senior in the Geological Engineering Program.

Much of Taylor Thom's work was directed toward understanding the country's resources of fossil fuels; his reports, beginning in the 1920's, set a standard for geologic investigations of coal, oil, and gas. He was one of the first to recognize the value of the

developing field of geophysics as it applied to exploration for oil and gas. His interests spanned the continent but focused on the mountain and plains states. In this regard, he was among the first to appreciate the potential for petroleum accumulations in the northern plains and particularly of the Williston Basin of Montana, the Dakotas, and Saskatchewan, an area which was to become one of the important producers of the continent.

The interest in energy sources led to investigations into the conditions under which they formed and the manner in which they were concentrated and preserved underground. Because of the relation of tectonic movements of the Earth's crust to fossil fuels, Taylor was long an active student of the nature and causes of deformation of the Earth. His imaginative work on this subject, particularly in the Rocky Mountains, marked significant advances in our understanding of the forces operating on the Earth's crust and the resulting geologic structures.

Shortly after arriving at Princeton, Taylor Thom began to look around for a location in which to establish a field camp for geological studies and training. In 1930 he formally began what was then known as the Red Lodge Project. The camp was located on the northern flank of the Beartooth Mountains near the coal-mining town of Red Lodge, Montana. The project, in Taylor's words, had "as its prime purpose the simultaneous advancement of the practical interest of the region, the furthering of fundamental geologic science, and the training of students under exceptionally favorable conditions."

A half-century later, the project is run by a cooperative group under the banner of the Yellowstone-Bighorn Research Association (YBRA). Indeed the "Princeton Camp" serves as a base for faculty research, graduate thesis investigations, undergraduate training in geologic field techniques, refresher courses for professional geologists, and even for Alumni Colleges.

Until he retired, Taylor had been involved as thesis advisor for more than 30 Ph.D. students from Princeton whose field areas were within the YBRA orbit. An additional 10 or more students from other universities enlisted him as a thesis advisor. Princeton still dominates the activities of the YBRA camp. But in the year of his death, more than 200 students, faculty, and alumni from 15 colleges and universities were based for shorter or longer periods of time at the field camp that Taylor Thom started, nurtured, and developed. Two buildings bear Professor Thom's name at the Red Lodge Camp. The W. Taylor Thom Library contains references and maps on Rocky Mountain geology. The Thom cabin is one of the new student dormitories dedicated in his name on the occasion of his 80th birthday in 1971.

During the years he lived in Princeton, Taylor was a member of the Princeton Friends Meeting, serving at one time or another on almost all of the governing committees of the Meeting. He chaired the committee that planned construction of the Meeting's First Day School and made substantial financial contributions to it. In his later years, he wrote extensively on international events in the context of Quaker belief.

Looking back over his life, it seems clear that Taylor's Quakerism carried far beyond the affairs of the Meeting. It seems very likely that his professional training and interests combined with his Quaker beliefs to convince him of the necessity of the cooperative and intelligent use of our natural resources for the common good. The Red Lodge Project reflected Taylor's Quaker beliefs in another way. Here he envisaged a cooperative enterprise of teaching and research, an enterprise which involved not just himself and a student or two. He sought to attract faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and non-academic geologists with diverse backgrounds and interests into a community

cooperating to search for a common understanding of the Earth. One can sense that throughout his life he was convinced that every person had a bit of the divine spark, and somehow if brought together, the sparks would flare into a common flame.

Indeed Taylor Thom held his beliefs firmly. His son, Bill, at his father's memorial service in the Princeton Meeting House told the following story that dated from a time after Taylor's retirement from the University but while he was still active in Meeting. Great difficulty was being experienced in reaching a consensus on a particular issue. In fact, so firmly did Taylor hold to his position that no consensus seemed possible as long as he was an active member of the Meeting. Taylor himself was on the verge of resigning. No one, including Taylor, wished that. The stalemate was resolved by electing Taylor to a specially created class-of-one, Friend Emeritus of the Meeting. It worked. Taylor no longer felt the need to be counted, and the active members were able to reach the needed consensus.

Taylor is survived by his wife, the former Rachel Trimble Hoopes, whom he married in 1916, and three children: William Taylor Thom, III, Dallas, Pennsylvania; Judith T. Phelps, Homedale, Idaho; and Elizabeth T. Bolser, Ashland, Oregon.

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