IN MEMORIAM

PAUL JENNINGS THOMPSON

Paul Jennings Thompson was born in Quincy, Ill., September 26, 1890, one of three children of William F. and Calpernia (Oldenhage) Thompson. The family moved to Kahoka, Mo., where he lived most of his boyhood and youth.

While in high school, he worked in the afternoon and Saturdays for the Clark County Courier, the weekly newspaper published in Kahoka. He was graduated from high school in 1908, the year journalism was first established as an academic discipline in an American university, at the University of Missouri. Lacking the money to go to college, he worked two years as a full-time employee on the Clark County Courier. On his savings, he entered the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri in 1910, and was graduated in three and a half years, destined to be one of the Missouri vanguard inspired by Dean Walter Williams to espouse the honor of the press and to spread journalism education across the nation.

After graduation, he was successively assistant editor of the Clark County Courier, editor of the Macon (Mo.) Republican, and a member of the advertising department of the Cedar Valley Times in Vinton, Iowa. During World War I, the Army turned him down twice for being too thin and underweight. The third time, he volunteered, he was accepted and sent to Camp McArthur near Waco, Texas. While there, he met and married Mrs. Bess Park (nee Gentry) of Waco. After the Armistice, he took his bride and young stepson, Adrian, to Billings, Montana, where he worked
on the Billings Gazette. A bitter cold winter, a wife homesick for Texas, and a recommendation by Dean Walter Williams soon brought him back to Texas to teach journalism.

In September, 1919, Paul Thompson joined the faculty of the School of Journalism at The University of Texas as adjunct professor. Although Journalism was housed in an unpainted wartime shack, the future of the five-year-old school looked promising. In 1925, however, it became an expendable pawn of Texas politics, when Governor Miriam A. Ferguson deleted the appropriation for Journalism along with that for Fine Arts in the biennium budget of The University of Texas.

With the abolishment of the School of Journalism, all members of the staff left the University except Paul Thompson. Feeling an obligation to the students already committed to a journalism degree, and deeply convinced that the honor of journalism education was on trial, he helped to work out a means of carrying on a sufficient program of courses in journalism and advertising under the aegis of the College of Business Administration to enable journalism majors to graduate with the B. J. degree during the next two years. While teaching more than a full load of courses, he also studied for a master's degree at the University, receiving the M.B.A. in August, 1927.

With the defeat of Governor Ferguson in the election of 1926, Mr. Thompson remained at the University to reorganize the teaching of journalism under a departmental status in the College of Arts and Sciences. In 1927, he became Chairman of the new Department and was authorized to hire one additional faculty member. He managed, however, to have a teaching staff of four by persuading the head of the University News and
Information Bureau to teach two courses and the head of student publications to teach one course—with no extra pay the first year.

With profound dedication to his work, he moved the Department of Journalism forward by the gradual process of institution-building. One of the first building blocks shaped to fit the needs of the University community as well as the needs of the Department of Journalism was the remodeling of Texas Student Publications, Inc. Through his position on the board of directors, and drawing upon more than seven years of newspaper experience, an intimate working knowledge of student publications gained at Missouri, and his education in business administration, he brought about business procedures and a financial policy so sound that in time Texas Student Publications became a model to be copied at many colleges and universities in the nation.

A companion building block which he fashioned during the same period was the integration of laboratory work in reporting and editing courses with the news-editorial work of The Daily Texan, while at the same time achieving a separation of editorial control of the Texan from the Department of Journalism and the University administration. By placing responsibility for the content of the Texan in the hands of the volunteer staff of students, and at the same time assuring continuity of policy through a faculty-student board of directors, he implemented a policy which gave journalism students a daily working example of freedom of the press and the maturing experience of responsibility. The Texan became a student newspaper that in all-round quality ranked second to none in the country, and it provided a standard and a daily opportunity for journalism students to "learn by doing" and "to teach
one another." There was nothing unique in an association between student publications and journalism department, but the remarkably effective balance achieved between cooperation and independence, between responsibility and freedom, between direction and initiative was unique. The interaction of these ingredients made a better institution for journalism education.

In a decade when it was common for professional schools to pack curriculums with professional courses, Mr. Thompson aligned the journalism curriculum with the basic degree requirements of Arts and Sciences, establishing a proportion of three-fourths liberal arts to one-fourth professional education for the B. J. degree. This ratio became one of the standards of excellence for national journalism school accreditation some twenty years later. It was another solid building block that would endure in the institution Paul Thompson was creating.

A Journalism Library became his next objective. Working through the Main Library, he systematically accumulated the books and periodicals related to the new fields of journalism and advertising. He kept his personal card catalogue on journalism books and periodicals up to date, classified by subject, and complete. After years of such preparation, a gift of $1000 from the student chapter of Theta Sigma Phi provided the necessary stimulant to get the Journalism Library started as a separate unit in the Journalism Building. In 1948, a visiting accreditation team rated the library as one of the best journalism collections in the country.

Although stern in the classroom and severe in grading, he had a compassion for students earning their own way and a sincere concern for student problems. Students sensed his austere manner was only
"classroom deep," and when in trouble, they sought his counsel. Once when a Ranger editor was put on enforced withdrawal, Mr. Thompson staged a "sit-in" at the Dean's office until the student was given a second chance. He advised one student to leave school because he was wasting his parents' money. When the student turned serious, he helped him organize a student advertising club. Today that student heads the advertising of one of America's largest corporations. The club which he organized in the University has become Alpha Delta Sigma, professional advertising fraternity. Through situations like these, he established close personal friendships with hundreds of students; and these friendships endured through the years after graduation.

When the depression of 1929-33 intensified student problems, Mr. Thompson intensified his efforts in their behalf. He became a one-man student employment bureau for journalism students who needed part-time jobs to stay in school. When the National Youth Administration allotted money for student aid to the University, he obtained more than a proportionate share of jobs for journalism students through proposals of worthwhile projects. On NYA financial aid, one student under Mr. Thompson's direction compiled the records of all sports events in the Southwest Conference--a project never before attempted. This work became the accepted record of the Conference and the basis of statistical comparison in Southwest sports reporting. Another student started a campus poll in the manner of the Gallup Poll; a year later he made it a national college poll. In time it became The Texas Poll--now in its 26th year serving the Texas press. To find jobs for graduating seniors, Mr. Thompson wrote the kind of letters that sold publishers, editors, and advertising managers on University of Texas journalism majors.
Although preoccupied with teaching, departmental duties, and student affairs, Mr. Thompson kept his own education updated with a budgeted program of reading. In the summers of 1930 and 1931, he did further graduate studies at Columbia University, and at the University of Chicago. He was promoted to full professor at The University of Texas in 1929, and made a member of the Graduate Faculty in 1931. Also, it was during this period that he was most active in the work of the University Methodist Church.

Central to Mr. Thompson's philosophy of life and work was an abiding concern for the integrity of the press. By his standards, a journalist who "boozed" was headed for ruin. A journalist who took a bribe was a blackguard and scoundrel. In J. 320, his course in Ethics of Journalism required of all journalism majors, he lectured vigorously on unbiased reporting, racial tolerance, and dangers of distortion of the news. On the press rests grave public responsibility, he insisted, and no man or woman should enter the profession who is unwilling to uphold the highest ideals of public service. Earnestly and sternly he charged his students with these solemn responsibilities. Thus he took the bright torch of press idealism from Dean Walter Williams and in turn placed it in the hands of hundreds of University of Texas graduates.

For those who knew him, Mr. Thompson's character was one of the constants in life, the same in classroom, office, social gathering on or off campus. Though always courteous and considerate, he never indulged in polite, meaningless praises merely to seem agreeable to others. At parties, dinners, and conventions, those who sought to engage him in light chitchat were likely to find themselves plunged into a discussion of a significant topic, and having no way to retreat.
In these ways, "Paul J." became a living legend among journalism students and a part of the conscience of each individual who took a course under him or who was associated with him for any considerable length of time.

In whatever organizational work Mr. Thompson participated, he was a stalwart. He was an ardent member of Sigma Delta Chi, men's journalism fraternity. He was founder and early president of the Southwestern Journalism Congress. He belonged and regularly attended the meetings of the Texas Press Association and of the South Texas Press Association, serving as Chairman of the Judges Committee for STPA newspaper contests continuously from 1930 to 1947. During the Christmas holiday period he dutifully attended the conventions of the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism. This was the power organization in journalism education during the early decades. Through the discussions of the AASDJ, modern university education in journalism emerged as a strong academic discipline. In the record of these discussions, one can discern a small group of leaders, who, taking over after the pioneering work of Walter Williams at Missouri and W. G. Bleyer at Wisconsin, shaped the new journalism program. They were Ralph Casey at Minnesota, Frank Martin at Missouri, Grant Hyde at Wisconsin, Kenneth Olson at Northwestern, and Paul J. Thompson at The University of Texas.

With the disruptions of World War II and the entry of the United States into the war, Mr. Thompson struggled to keep the Department and student publications going, but he found time to make a singular contribution to the war effort. As hundreds of the "Journalism Family" scattered to training camps, battle fronts overseas, and on warships and airbases
around the world, Mr. Thompson determined to encourage them with a "letter from home." His mimeographed newsletter became an exchange by which exes in far-flung places maintained contact with each other as well as with the University. Mr. Thompson dedicated himself to seeking out his "boys" in the service. He laboriously typed his newsletters himself at night, making them at intervals of about three months, and each letter brought that warm feeling to the reader that somebody back home besides his family was concerned about him.

With the end of the war, Journalism at The University of Texas experienced its greatest growth. More than twenty-five years of unceasing attention to the job of institution-building brought a harvest of accomplishments and recognitions for Mr. Thompson. He was elected national president of the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism for 1946-47. In this capacity and as a member of the AASDJ Council on Standards of Journalism, he became one of the designers of the national accreditation program in journalism education. Out of six hundred institutions teaching journalism, only forty-seven received accreditation in the first round of accreditation visits; one of these was the Department of Journalism at The University of Texas. With the accreditation, the University administration raised the Department of Journalism to the "School of Journalism" and Mr. Thompson's rank to "Director." The achievement called for a "Paul J. Thompson Appreciation Dinner and Fund." More than four hundred former students, University administrative heads, and representatives of the press attended the dinner, and the appreciation fund came to $2,000, to be spent in whatever way Mr. Thompson deemed best for Journalism.
Honors were fine, but Paul Thompson had no intention of retiring or taking it easy. A year earlier he had written a 137-page report to the President of the University on "Recommendations for the Development of the School of Journalism," and he intended to carry them out.

By 1952, with the support of Regent David M. Warren, he had fashioned another "building block" for the institution he was creating. This was the new $650,000 Journalism Building. Up to that time Journalism had always occupied the oldest building on the campus. In one way or another, however, Mr. Thompson had been planning for a new building ever since he became Chairman of the Department in 1927.

On May 1, 1953, Paul J. Thompson took a day off to be in Columbia, Mo., to receive from his alma mater the Missouri Honor Award for Distinguished Service in Journalism. In the twenty-four years that the University of Missouri had made these annual awards, this was the first ever bestowed on a journalism educator.

It would be difficult to say what Mr. Thompson's major interests were for the next several years, because once started, he never lost interest in a project or goal. By the mid-1950's, the Newspaper seminars held regularly at the School of Journalism by Texas Daily Newspaper Association had become one of these flourishing on-going projects. On several occasions at the Seminar's final banquet, to which the Chancellor and other high University officials were invited, Mr. Thompson took much satisfaction in appraising the importance of the editors present in terms of the combined circulation of the newspapers they represented—usually well over two million. Scholarships for journalism students was another
goal which he pursued with notable success. The big "break-through" had come in 1952 when he persuaded Jesse H. Jones to make a grant of $25,000 for journalism scholarships over a ten-year period. After that Mr. Thompson managed to add a few more each year.

At the end of the spring semester of 1958, he retired from the directorship to full-time teaching, and was named Director Emeritus. The new Regential rule of mandatory retirement from administrative positions at age 65 had surprised the twelve faculty veterans affected that year, but the transfer of leadership in Journalism went smoothly. The School's affairs were in business-like order. He recommended strongly that his successor be the next oldest faculty member in years of service. On his last day as Director, Mr. Thompson talked with his successor at length about various matters, ending the conversation with words to this effect: "Many years ago I selected you to be on this faculty, and we have been close friends through the years. Now if people should see me coming in and out of your office, they would likely think I was trying to continue to dominate the School of Journalism through using you to carry out my wishes. Therefore, I will not enter your office and I will not give any advice about the School." He kept his word. He never once set foot in the Director's office again. Likewise, he ventured no suggestions or advice unless vigorously requested.

With his retirement a spontaneous movement to honor Mr. Thompson came from Journalism exes, faculty members, and the Texas press. On December 5 at a gala banquet in the Union Building more than five hundred
friends hailed him as "Mr. Journalism." The Daily Texan published a special six-page "Thompson Section." The main address was entitled "Forty Years on the Forty Acres."

Mr. Thompson retired from teaching in the fall of 1959 to devote full time to the writing of a book on the responsibilities of the press. He came to his office in the Journalism Building regularly, completing a daily quota of work on the book. Each chapter was carefully projected weeks in advance of writing. Several mild to moderate heart attacks slowed him down, but after each he returned determinedly to his work on the book. His family and a few of his closest friends knew that he was in a race against time, but the matter was never discussed. By spring of 1964 the book was completed—a typed manuscript of 1500 pages. He had kept a resolution made many years earlier to write a comprehensive book on the ethics of journalism—one worthy of the significance of the subject. He entitiled the book "Professional Responsibilities in Journalism," and for the dedication he wrote: "Dedicated to the memory of Walter Williams, whose ideals gave birth to my interest in Ethics of Journalism."

He was in the midst of negotiations by correspondence with a publisher when he died at his home the night of May 22, 1964.
"Paul J.", a dedicated man, left the fruits of his purposeful life as a heritage to those who knew him, and to others who, though unacquainted with the man, will benefit by his life.

Norman Hackerman
Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Eugene W. Nelson
Secretary of the General Faculty

The Resolutions were prepared by a Special Committee consisting of DeWitt C. Reddick, chairman, Joe B. Frantz and Ernest A. Sharpe.