Celebrating the Life of Thompson G. Marsh

Monday, Dec. 14, 1992, the College of Law held a memorial service at Whately Chapel celebrating the life of Thompson G. Marsh. Faculty, students, alumni, and friends were invited.

Professor Emeritus John Carver, Jr., began the service by saying that a few weeks ago, after the death of J. Churchill Owen, those attending his memorial service stood and applauded him. "This memorial service for Thompson is in the same spirit. We want his family to see that it is our commitment—a commitment particularly of the College of Law—that the Thompson Marsh legend will live on. Thus we celebrate his life." And just to keep the perimeters clear, Carver reminded the speakers that Thompson was not fond of long meetings, faculty or otherwise, and this one must honor him in that respect as well. The following are excerpts of reflections given at that service:

"Teaching, family, birds, and music. These were the keystones of his life, and this is how we will remember him, along with his Laconic (birthplace: Lacon, Ill.) wit."

Marion Gottesfeld, University of Denver trustee.

Marion Gottesfeld, friend and University of Denver trustee, pointed out the strong thread of conviction inherent in his every pursuit.

"He developed teaching techniques which he used with utmost enjoyment for 60 years." Thompson drilled the students in his own personal technicolor style: "He used a system of color underlining: red and black, blue and green, to brief legal cases in the same way we were taught to diagram sentences when we were in grade school." Through this repetitive drill, students learned to focus on the specifics of each case, preventing extraneous details from obscuring the facts. "Not many of us could revel in repeating such processes over and over again.

"The New York Times" in reporting his death last week emphasized that his classes influenced at least 4,000 lawyers who have practiced in the Denver area. "Even repetitious chromosomes enhanced the joys of his life. There was no mixture of offspring, but four little girls—"

the threads of his life that grew into skeins. This is what brought him the honor of his family, peers, and students, and the honor of this University."

"Thompson above all taught disciplined thinking."

Dean Emeritus Daniel S. Hoffman, JD '58.

Dean Emeritus and partner, Holme Roberts & Owen, Daniel S. Hoffman began by stating that Thompson, probably more than any single person, will forever remain part of the fabric of this law school.

"He could sometimes be outrageous, but he was always challenging. He could present a stern face, and, Lord knows, he could be contentious. But if you looked very closely there usually was a twinkle in his eye. And beneath the surface of that austere look was a great sense of humor."

"Thompson, above all, taught disciplined legal thinking. He required us to be precise, to put aside hyperbole, and, I should add, recognize dictum for what it was. He required us to know what the law was in crisp and carefully defined terms."

"Thompson was a paradox as an academic. On one hand, he really was not very interested in publishing classic law review articles. On the other hand, he was one of the intellectual giants in this country in property law and particularly in the area of future interests. He rendered expert witness assistance in many a court case and was frequently cited as an authority by the appellate courts."

"Thompson was a whole person, a many-faceted person. For example, he genuinely was a world-class authority on birds and a skilled mountaineer. We all kidded Thompson about his hobby of bird-watching. But he brought the same intensity and

A remarkable man.
discipline to bird-watching as he did to the law, and that's what made him a respected authority on birds.

"Thompson, we will miss you. But you will live on as part of every one of us who had the opportunity to study at your feet."

"He was an intellectual leader at the College of Law."
Professor Emeritus William M. Beaney

Professor Emeritus William M. Beaney spoke about the legacy Thompson Marsh left behind. Beaney pointed out that even though Marsh is not known for an extensive publication list, he was an intellectual leader at the College of Law. He brought from Yale an intimate awareness of the Hohfeldian method of analyzing cases: Every student was important to Thompson because he or she would practice law some day. Beaney concluded by stating that Marsh strongly felt the students deserved the finest legal education possible, and he was dedicated to giving them just that.

"Now, as we celebrate my father's life, I suggest that we should underline in RED the CONCLUSION that Thompson Marsh lived a magnificent life and thoroughly enjoyed it."
Professor Lucy Marsh

Thompson's daughter, Professor Lucy A. Marsh opened by thanking all the speakers for their nice comments. She continued by saying, "You should know that he was also very proud of you, his former students and valued colleagues in law, music, birding, and mountain climbing."

"As you know, my father was a man who figured out what was important to him, and then lived his life accordingly. He ended every family letter with the phrase, "... have a GOOD time, EVERY day." And he definitely followed that advice himself.

"As many of you have noticed, today is good weather for building a backyard skating rink, which he and my mother did for many years. The skating rink reminds me of the fun my sisters and I had as children, taking turns putting water on the ice on freezing cold nights, and looking up at the constellations which he had taught us. That story reminds me of the way, when we were little children, he taught us the names of all the wildflowers—in Latin. We all have rich and wonderful memories of him."

"As part of having a good time EVERY day, my parents enjoyed camping in Alaska, the Yukon, and the Northwest ter-

ritories, climbing vertical mud in the Ruin zones of Africa, and even rambling around on Pikes Peak one New Year's Eve."

"It is a good thing that he didn't leave all those activities until retirement. Thanks to the kindness and wisdom of Marion Goffe and Bob Yegge, and Dan Hoffman, my father's retirement didn't even begin until he was 84 years old. In fact, we just realized that, if he started school when he was about 5 years old, then he spent his entire life, except for 10 years, as a schoolboy."

"And to those of you who shared that life with him, I think he would want me to say, thank you."

"He had a sharp wit. He had a zest for life. He was devoted. These are all great qualities. You find people like Thompson Marsh so rarely that you treasure them."
Chancellor Daniel L. Ritchie

Chancellor Daniel L. Ritchie concluded the formal remarks on behalf of the Board of Trustees "who admired and even revered Thompson Marsh."

"We remember pioneers like John Evans, who founded this University and led its trustees for 33 years. We remember leaders like Chancellor Henry Buxtel, who took DU over 21 years, from bankruptcy to greatness. And we remember teachers like Ammi Hyde, who was the best and the best-loved professor at this University for 41 years. Tom served longer than all of them. And he shared with them the qualities that make up a legend."

"He had that quality we call devotion. Chancellor Buxtel and Ammi Hyde stuck with this University for several years when it could not even pay its employees. The University did not fall back into such dire straits during the 60 years that Tom taught here, but let me quote Tom on this subject. He said, 'This University always had what might be called a prudent policy with regard to faculty salaries. Therefore, I have been compelled to live a life of wholesome frugality. No booze, no tobacco, no coffee, no tea, and not too much food.'"

"His devotion to his work and to this University made him unique in many respects, and in one respect in particular: he started at the University of Denver law school as the youngest law professor in the country and retired 60 years later as the oldest. And on his retirement, he said, 'I think I did just what I wanted to all my life.'"

"Tom and Susan certainly both loved music, and Tom certainly loved Susan. I want to close with an anecdote about his two loves that reveal another of his many qualities: his sharp wit. I wasn't too long ago that Tom and Susan attended one of the concerts they frequented at the Lamont School of Music. There was a piece on the program that evening that was a modern atonal composition. And at one point, the percussionist stuck her head into the piano and played it with a pair of clamps. At least, I think she was playing it; it was hard to tell."

"After the performance, Tom said to me, 'That's one of those pieces you need to hear several times to be sure you don't like it.'"

"Tom was a true legend. We will treasure the time he spent with us."
Dean Emeritus Robert B. Yegge: "Thompson is the spirit of the College of Law. He is the spirit and engine that has driven me and thousands of other lawyers who have been under his tutelage."

Family concert.

Spent 60 years on the faculty.

Susan and Thompson on ice.

Thompson G. Marsh

Birthplace: Lacon, Illinois
Birthday: March 15, 1903
Personal: Married Susan Raymond in 1935; had four daughters
Occupation: Professor, University of Denver College of Law for 60 years
Legal specialties: property and mining law, future interest, legal philosophy, Hohfeldian analysis, and analytical jurisprudence
Degrees: BA ’24, LLB cum laude ’27, MA ’31 University of Denver; LLM ’31 Northwestern; JSD ’35 Yale University, Doctor of Humane Letters DU ’87
Hobbies: Birding (life-list of more than 800 species), mountain climbing (climbed all of Colorado’s 14,000 foot peaks), ice skating (loved to skate on his backyard ‘ice rink’), member DU Faculty Skating Club
Honors: University Lecturer ’63, Charles W. Delaney, Jr., Professor of Law ’71, Thompson G. Marsh Chair ’78, Doctorate of Humane Letters Honorary Degree ’87, University of Denver College of Law, and Award of Merit, Colorado Bar Association ’85, Professor Emeritus ’87
Quote: "Anything that’s worth doing at all is worth doing poorly."
Death: December 5, 1992, Denver, Colorado
Taught disciplined legal thinking.

Professor Ved Nanda:
"One day I met Thompson after he had walked the three or four miles to school in the pouring rain, carrying his binoculars. All I could say was, 'Thompson, you are totally drenched.' In typical fashion, he responded, 'Well, when you have an image, you have to live up to it.'"