In Memoriam: Raymond H. Thompson

University Communications
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Raymond H. Thompson, director emeritus of the Arizona State Museum and the former director of the School of Anthropology died Jan. 29. He was 95.

Thompson began what would become a 41-year career at the University in July 1956. In 1964, he became director of the Arizona State Museum and the Department of Anthropology, which later became the School of Anthropology. He stepped down as department head in 1980, but remained museum director until 1997, when he officially retired at age 73.

"When I think of Raymond H. Thompson, one word comes to mind: giant," said Patrick Lyons, current director of the Arizona State Museum. "He was a man of giant intellect, prophetic vision, unequaled diplomacy, never-failing graciousness and infinite wisdom. I am as humbled as I am inspired by his legacy."

Thompson oversaw a period of growth in the Department of Anthropology, including an increase in the number of anthropology faculty from 14 to 40. He was known for a commitment to diversity and was involved in the development of the American Indian Studies, Africana Studies and Mexican American Studies programs as well as the University of Arizona Press.

During his time leading the Arizona State Museum, it became one of the first museums in the country to earn American Association of Museums accreditation, marking its commitment to a comprehensive set of professional standards and best practices. Thompson also led the effort to establish the state's first collections conservation laboratory at ASM and was an early adopter of using computers in collections management. In the fall of 2019, the Arizona State Museum's north building was named the Raymond H. Thompson Building.

Thompson continued to dedicate himself to the museum and the School of Anthropology in the decades after his retirement. He was a frequent speaker at events and continued to publish. His most recent book, which he co-authored, was "A Jesuit Missionary in Eighteenth Century Sonora: The Family Correspondence of Philipp Segesser," published in 2014.

He was known among friends, family and colleagues for his skill in writing doggerels—poetry written with irregular rhythm and rhyme, often in a comic style. The Arizona State Museum archives includes a collection of his doggerels dating from 1947 to 2016.

Thompson's family has not announced public services at this time. He is survived by daughters Margaret Luchetta of Danjoutin, France, and Mary Thompson of Tigard, Oregon. Gifts in his memory can be made to the Arizona State Museum in support of the Raymond H. and Molly K. Thompson Endowment Fund for Research or to the School of Anthropology in support of the Raymond H. Thompson Award, given each year for significant contributions to the field of anthropology. Both are named for Thompson and his wife, Molly, who passed
away in 2014. Checks can be made payable to UA Foundation/ASM or UA Foundation/SOA.

More information on Thompson's life and legacy [7] can be found on the Arizona State Museum's tribute page.

Lo Que Pasa profiled Thompson [8] in 2018 as part of a story on University anthropology researchers continuing to work decades past their official retirement.

Below is a doggerel written by Thompson on Aug. 5, 2017, to celebrate the unique comma partnership he had with longtime friend, co-author and research collaborator Bob Dahlquist.

The Comma

Behold the humble comma,  
Source of much frustration,  
As well as endless trauma,  
In the realm of punctuation.

It's just a tiny curlicue  
That appears in great profusion  
To keep words from going askew  
And help reduce confusion.

It creates a lot of drama  
For both writers and editors  
Who occupy a panorama  
As fierce competitors.

We all yearn for clarity  
On every written page  
To give the author popularity  
And the image of a sage

The comma helps to separate  
Word from phrase and from idea.  
Or does it simply complicate  
And make the problem more severe?

Bob is a comma profligate  
And scatters them around with glee.  
He simply cannot tolerate  
A single page that's comma free.

Ray is a comma miser  
And carefully sends them back  
To Bob, the comma sympathizer,  
Who hangs them all upon a rack.
Where they await uncertain fate
Tiny curlicues hanging by the dozen,
But happy that they are, in aggregate,
More numerous than Bob's cousins.

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