

Feature

Tom Thompson

Teacher, mentor, friend, Christian...all describe Tom Thompson or Tommy as many call him. Tom started teaching at Sheyenne River Academy in the fall of 1961. A native of Kansas, he and his wife, Ella Mae (Tachenko) started what turned into 29 years of teaching in North Dakota.

Tom started his teaching career at Champion Academy where he taught for one year before he was drafted into the army. Tom spent two years in the service during the Korean War but was never sent overseas. After his return, he taught at Plainview Academy for one year then taught at Enterprise Academy in his home state for five years before moving to North Dakota.

Tom started his first year at Sheyenne River Academy teaching New Testament history, Bible doctrines, world history, general math and American history. Through the years he taught physics, physical science, drivers education, algebra, trigonometry, geometry and several history courses.

For a few years in the '60's, Tom also taught a medic cadet corp class. The class was a way of introducing Adventist men to the armed forces and better enable them to be noncombatants if drafted.

Tom also served as the boys dean for a semester in the spring of 1975 and conducted a men' chorus at one point. After retiring in the spring of 1990, having taught for 36 1/2 years, he was "recycled," as Ella Mae puts it, last fall.

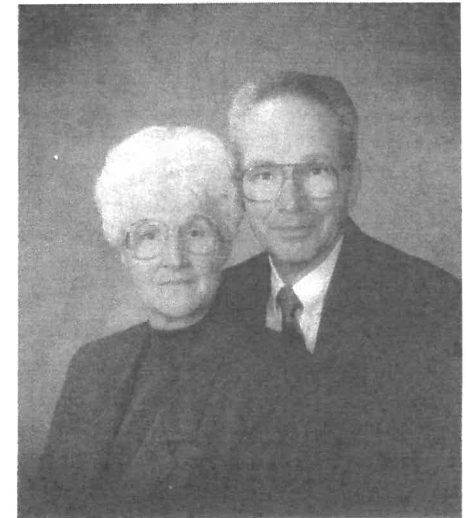
Dakota Academy was unable to find a math teacher because of a general shortage. Tom, volunteered to step in until a new one could be found. So, eight years after he retired, he was back in the classroom teaching four math classes.

"I was intrigued this year to discover that I was teaching a grandchild of a student I taught during my student teaching in college," Thompson says.

Ella Mae did a great many things as well at the academy as well. Through the years she taught piano and organ, performed assistant dean duties and served as food service director.

Thompsons have had a great influence on many people and their environment in general. Faculty row at Dakota Academy is named after them. The alumni association has been blessed with their experience and their hours of dedicated work. The development department has also greatly benefited from them.

An extensive alumni data base for Plainview as well as Sheyenne River and Dakota Academies records is kept by the Thompsons. For years, the Thompsons have been the source for labels. and reports for the development office. They spend hours every year



Tom and Ella Mae Thompson

sorting bulk rate mailings and many other things.

"I personally don't know what I would have done without the Thompsons," says Heidi Boggs, development director. "They have helped me so much making all the family connections and helping me figure out which alumni are from which school. Their wealth of knowledge of names and their dedicated help has been a true life saver."

"Thompson's connection with alumni, receipting of donations and responding to donors is an invaluable asset," says Mike Schwartz, principal.

Thompson's have worked with many people over the years. Tom has worked with fifteen principals and hundreds of students have passed through his classrooms as he has taught theorems, postulates and corollaries.

Lyle Hansen, former principal of Sheyenne River speaks fondly of Tom.

"I recall an episode one evening when Tom and I were standing outside visiting and we heard gunshots going off in a field nearby. Suddenly, a shot rang out quite near. We worried about the potential danger of bullets in the neighborhood so we went in search of the gunman. After returning without finding the gunner, we discovered a bicycle tire had blown on the street behind them. Hansen laughed at the recollection, saying he and Tom and spent a lot of good times together and he enjoyed working with him.

Former student and present staff member of DAA, Delilah Treft, talks of how the Thompsons have always been very considerate.

"They'll drop anything to help you. They are very enthusiastic and warm hearted," Treft says.

"They have been my home away from home in years past and have been like parents to me in their advice and their wonderful hospitality." Delilah now works as food service director for the academy.

Tom has seen God working with the schools, both SRA and DAA through the years. Anytime he and Ella Mae felt it was maybe time to move on, there was never a call. The calls always came when they decided it was not time for them to leave. After awhile, people quit calling. They didn't mind.

Working at other schools helped Tom realize that if things weren't going well, you had to face the problems because they were bound to resurface again later even if you moved. This philosophy has helped he and Ella Mae be more stable.

"People have asked me, 'If you had it to do all over again, would you change anything?' I've told them I wouldn't change much but maybe I would have looked at teenage pranks with a bit more lenience," Thompson says.

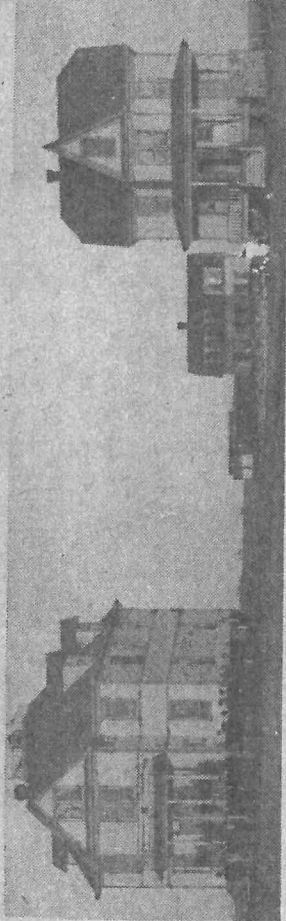
"I strongly believe in strict discipline but you must be balanced in your approach. It's like the story of the son who's mother came home to discover he hadn't put the laundry in and she got upset with him. He sat down and told her about all the things that his friends were doing to get in trouble with the law and said he was sorry he didn't get the laundry done but he felt she should't be so hard on him. The point was well taken, though students still need strong direction," Thompson says.

"Tom and Ella Mae continue to be the moving force, the one constant, in the successes of DAA," says Schwartz. "Their unmatched dedication to the school and its constituents has been appreciated by all. At a time when others retreat to a more pleasant climate than the Northern Plains they volunteer their time and efforts to ensure the future of our school."

"Tom's energy and commitment to his students this semester is contagious. It is marvelous to have Tom and Ella Mae on our campus as mentors and shining examples of selfless Christian service," says Schwartz. "Our school would not be the same without them."

History Of SRA-DAA

(T. P. Thompson, DAA math/science teacher did his research and presented this speech May, 1989, at the Bismarck SDA Church for the centennial theme talk regarding education.)



SRA, Harvey, ND, opened 1904 (picture taken 1907).

Sheyenne River Academy, three miles north of Harvey, ND, opened in 1904, originally called the Harvey Industrial School for two years. Citizens of Harvey donated a quarter section of land and around \$2,000 in cash to attract the school to that location. It was a boarding school with both elementary and secondary students being encouraged to attend. In early years, the secondary students often attended only a few months between harvest and seeding time. Some of the older students would be assigned to elementary and secondary classes, a real forerunner of individualizing their teaching.

In addition to emphasis on Christian principles being taught in all classes, the school taught Russian, German, Scandinavian and taught English to students whose first language was not English. Formal Bible classes were not required in those early years. One of the things our schools often forget to suggest, even today as we explain our purpose, is that even in a math class, the instructor can emphasize spiritual things, and that while Bible classes, presently required, are not the only way that we approach spiritual things.

In the early years, records show that there were nine Bible classes offered but only a few students were signed up for those classes.

Music has always been an important part of academy curriculum. As far back as 1910, when finances were very tight, the farm manager and business manager were let go, but the music teacher was kept on staff. Private music lessons and music groups have always been an important part of school curriculum contributing to the spiritual life and also being a major public relations factor to the school.

The enrollment of Sheyenne River Academy was usually between 100 and 120 students each year; those were students taking both elementary and secondary classes.

The records indicate that Ella Mae Tkachenko's father, a young adult then, was enrolled at SRA in 1920 and he was taking seventh grade English and ninth grade mathematics, tenth grade Bible. Classes were purely individualized taking students at the level suited for the student.



DAA, Bismarck, ND, opened Fall of 1977.

The early years several of these students would live at home on campus, because there were many homes in the village of Saundersville that were never incorporated. In the 1960s there was still evidence of eight or nine old foundations of homesites. By the 1960s, the school had purchased most of them, and Saundersville site became school property.

It was difficult to find housing for students, especially before 1928. They would build a new laundry building and then the record showed that the school had an overflow of students and so the laundry became a dormitory although it was not a dormitory building. A new dorm was built for the girls in 1916 or 1917. It burned shortly afterwards, and so a second dorm was built which also burned in 1927. That triggered the idea of the new dormitories being built in 1927, and the students moved in the Fall of 1928 and finished them while they lived in them. These housed the students quite adequately until the school was relocated at Bismarck.

of Bismarck and just before ground breaking-time, a different plot of land, north of Bismarck was purchased on which to build the academy.

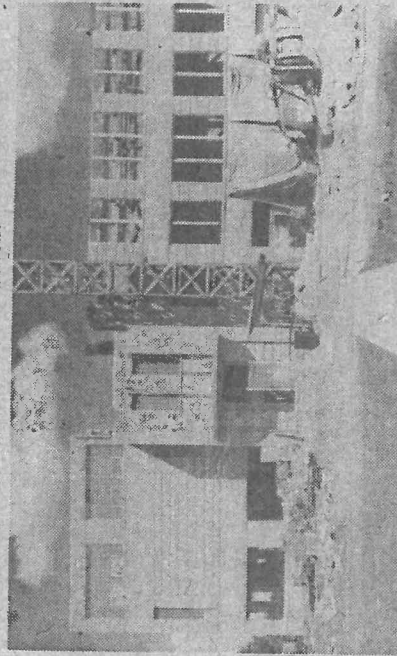
The two problems that the academy in Harvey faced in early years were: water problems and housing problems for both students and staff. There were only five or six homes on the original Sheyenne River Academy campus, and many times the Saundersville homes across the road to the west would be available, but some years the owners would decide to use the houses themselves.

In 1958 or 1959 the push was made to lay piping so Sheyenne River Academy could hook into the Harvey water system. City water turned out to be a real blessing, but prior to that time board minutes show that many times the priority item was "We need a new well." "We need to repair the well." "The sandpoint needs to be replaced on the well." Usually it was Friday night when the well gave trouble. The old well was on the river-bottom when Thomas Thompson came in 1960; students still told stories of spending hours and hours on that well. In May of 1977, Sheyenne River Academy graduated its last students. In July, a large share of the equipment and buildings were sold, and the school was moved to the new location north of Bismarck. There were 1,322 students that graduated from SRA. In about the same length of time there were 860 students that graduated from Plainview Academy.

The first graduate at Sheyenne River was in 1912, a single graduate. They felt that this really brought the school to maturity. It was open for eight years and that was the first time they could have a graduating class--one student, Regina Litwinenco.

In 1913, Marion Edwards who had been a church school teacher taking academy subjects at the same time she was teaching, graduated. Records suggest she was taking some postgraduate work, as many of the older students did after they had received their diplomas.

Since the school was relocated at Bismarck, there have been 273 students graduated from Dakota Adventist Academy up to May of 1988. This makes a grand total of 1,595 students.



SRA new administration building, 1948.

In the 1960s when the fire insurance officials began to question the safety of the dormitories built in 1928, plans were made to build new dorms. When plans failed to develop, the decision was finally made in 1974 to build an all new school at Bismarck. A plot was obtained east