Memorial to George Alfred Thiel
1892–1979

FREDERICK M. SWAIN
Department of Geology, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19711

George A. Thiel, member of the geology faculty at the University of Minnesota from 1920 until 1961, and chairman of the Department of Geology and Mineralogy from 1944 to 1961, died September 8, 1979, at a nursing home in Frederic, Wisconsin. He had been living in Frederic at the home of his daughter and son-in-law, Marianne and Marshall Battig, in recent years.

George Thiel, the youngest of nine children, was born November 19, 1892, in Staples, Minnesota. His father, Frederich Ferdinand Thiel, was born in Stetin, Pomerania, Germany, November 22, 1851. The next year Frederich’s parents moved to a farm near Wausau, Wisconsin. In the spring of 1870 they moved to Iowa and settled in a wild prairie farm near Rockford. All of George’s brothers and sisters were born in Iowa. Frederich and his brother, August, who had a family of seven, moved to Minnesota and began to open the heavily timbered farm land around Staples. The brothers married sisters, so there were 16 double cousins living across the road from each others.

George was born soon after the family moved from their sod home into a frame farm home. Except for two sisters who were teachers and one sister who was a nurse, George was the only child to attend high school, and of course in later years, the University of Minnesota. George graduated from high school at St. Paul Park, Minnesota, as valedictorian. George’s daughter and son-in-law give a yearly “George A. Thiel Memorial Scholarship” at the Frederic Wisconsin High School, to go to the class valedictorian.

George Thiel attended the University of Minnesota from 1913 to 1917 where he majored in biology. He was graduated with honors and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He continued as a graduate student in biology, but in 1917 he was called by the army and after his training was commissioned a Second Lieutenant. He served in France where he was in charge of a medical laboratory and was discharged in 1919. He then returned to the University of Minnesota and completed a Master’s degree in biology in 1920. In addition to biology he also took course work in geology and in 1923 completed his Ph.D. degree in geology. His doctoral dissertation was on the manganese deposits of the Cuyuna Iron Range, Minnesota. From 1920 onward he served successively as an instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor.

In 1923 George married Inez Erickson. Their daughter Marianne Thiel Battig, resides in Frederic, Wisconsin. Inez passed away in 1969.

At their home near the University Campus in Minneapolis, the Thiels were frequent hosts to faculty and students. George was an expert flower gardener and took great pride in displaying his latest horticultural achievements.

In 1944, upon the retirement of W. H. Emmons, Prof. Thiel became chairman of the department and, particularly during the critical postwar years, he worked tirelessly to
maintain the strong reputation of the department. He remained chairman until his retirement in 1961.

He had an outstanding reputation as a teacher, particularly in general geology courses, and was awarded the Neil A. Miner award from the National Association of Geology Teachers in 1958. In 1932 he collaborated with departmental colleagues in the preparation of the well-known geology textbook, *Geology: Principles and Practices* by Emmons, Thiel, Stauffer, and Allison, which was to go through four editions.

That commitment to Minnesota geology continued throughout his career and is reflected in his geologic writings, which include five bulletins of the Minnesota Geological Survey (three co-authored with C. R. Stauffer, C. E. Dutton, and G. M. Schwartz) and *Minnesota Rocks and Waters* by Schwartz and Thiel.

In addition to his early studies of manganese deposits, George Thiel made important scientific contributions in the geology of marls, limestones, building stones, the St. Peter Sandstone, underground water resources of Minnesota, and archeological geology. Some of his publications are listed below.

After the death of his wife, George moved to Frederic, Wisconsin, where he helped in the local greenhouse and floral shop owned by his son-in-law and daughter, and continued to pursue his hobby of flower gardening. He remained there until his death.

The dozens of Minnesota geology graduates during the 1940s and 1950s whose careers he helped to further, as well as his many friends and colleagues in the profession, will remember George Thiel as a man of high principles and kindly nature. His career stands as a fine example to all who knew him.

Acknowledgments

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