

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS WAYNE H. THOMPSON**

Wayne Howard Thompson, professor emeritus of preventive medicine, was born in 1922 in Guttenberg, Iowa, and died in Madison, Wisconsin in 2000.

Professor Thompson had an interesting career before joining the University of Wisconsin. He received his DVM from Iowa State University in 1943 and served as an Army veterinary medical officer through 1944. He then began a large animal practice in Earlville, Iowa while also serving as mayor for nine years and a term as school board president.

Between 1957 and 1961 he earned an MPH from the University of Minnesota and a PhD from the University of Wisconsin. Upon completion of his PhD he was one of the first faculty members recruited to the newly created Department of Preventive Medicine (now the Department of Population Health Sciences). A National Institutes of Health career development award provided a promising start to his research career.

Professor Thompson's primary interest was in the field of arbovirology. His attention was naturally drawn to the mosquito-borne California virus encephalitis, which sickened young children in La Crosse and the coulees regions of Wisconsin and Minnesota. The virology, ecology and epidemiology of this infection became his career-long research interest in cooperation with colleagues in entomology and veterinary science.

His first major contribution was the rarely achieved isolation of the La Crosse strain of the California encephalitis virus from the brain of a child who had died of the disease. This isolate became the standard La Crosse strain antigen for many of the serologic diagnostic tests that were subsequently developed.

Over the years Thompson and his graduate students went on to demonstrate that the La Crosse virus infected small woodland mammals and deer and that a woodland mosquito *Aedes triseriatis* was the arthropod vector. Thompson's group determined that the virus over-wintered transovarially and that the female's eggs could be infected by infected males through sexual transmission. In the endemic area eggs were deposited and developed in small tree holes containing water. Thus the mechanisms by which the virus persisted in the wooded areas of the region were elucidated.

The mosquito's weak flying ability explained the high risk of infection in children living in rural areas or households adjacent to wooded areas but not its occurrence in children in urban areas. This puzzling distribution was explained by Thompson's discovery that the mosquito also bred in water collected in abandoned tires and other containers commonly discarded in urban areas.

Using the findings of Thompson and his Wisconsin colleagues, public health agencies in the La Crosse area and in nearby Minnesota undertook a campaign to control this serious malady of young children. Public education about avoiding mosquito bites was implemented and public cooperation was enlisted in collecting and discarding old tires and other water-containing refuse as well as filling tree holes near dwellings. These and other measures resulted in a notable decrease in the occurrence of La Crosse virus encephalitis that persists to this day.

It is rare that the products of an individual's research can be so quickly applied to improve the public's health. For his outstanding research achievements, Professor Thompson was recognized with the highest award of the Wisconsin Public Health Association in 1985.

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Wayne Thompson was a gentle man with a quiet sense of humor and an unfailing willingness to be of any assistance to students and colleagues. As one of the founding members of the Department of Preventive Medicine he provided an example for all who followed him.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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