



Neil Truman Eckstein

05/16/1923 - 03/09/2011

Neil Truman Eckstein

Rev. Dr. Neil T. Eckstein, 87, passed away on March 9, 2011. He was born May 16, 1923 on his family's farm near Winchester, the son of Earl Mayhew Eckstein and Laura Berner Eckstein. Last fall, Neil and his wife Marie celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary. Always patient, Neil's quiet determination and vision were a gift he gave to his family every day. His four children and four grandchildren have been unusually blessed by his wisdom, his kindness and his lifelong commitment to them.

Neil attended one-room Grandview School and Winneconne High School, and in 1941 entered St Olaf College as a freshman. Following the start of World War II he enlisted in the Navy V-12 program and studied at St Olaf, Dubuque University and Columbia University. He was commissioned an Ensign in the USNR in 1943 in the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York City. He served in the Pacific and commanded landing craft during the invasion of islands near Okinawa in 1945. He kept in contact with his shipmates, especially over the last twenty years, at reunions held around the country. Following the war Neil returned to St Olaf and completed his Bachelor degree in English. In 1947 he met the love of his life, Marie Magdalene Waag, who had recently graduated as an RN from Fairview Hospital School of Nursing in Minneapolis. They were married a year later. After graduating from college, he was called to the ministry and entered Luther Seminary in St. Paul MN, receiving his Bachelor of Theology degree in 1951. He was ordained as a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and served parishes in Eau Claire, WI, Lake Wilson, MN, Stoughton, WI and Philadelphia, PA. While in Philadelphia, he also enrolled in the graduate program in American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He received both his MA and PhD degrees from Penn. He was a professor of English at Wartburg College from 1961 to 1966, and then at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh from 1966 until his retirement in 1988. From 1991 until 1996 Neil and Marie served as Senior Mentors at California Lutheran University, where Neil taught in the English Department and Marie worked with international students. Besides teaching, Neil was an author and translator. His novels depict life in Wisconsin as experienced by Norwegian-American immigrants of the mid-19th century. They include "Jacob's War" which traced one of his ancestor's journey through the Civil War. He also translated several works by Norwegian-American writer Peer Stromme who was born in Winchester to immigrant parents. He wrote scholarly works analyzing the writings and sermons of 17th century puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards as well as the social criticism of Norwegian immigrant writers and economists of the 19th century.

Neil was committed to stimulating the intellectual life of his local community. In 1973 he worked together with others to found the Winchester Academy. The Academy brought historians, poets, foreign ambassadors and others to

Winchester to speak on a wide variety of topics. It relocated to Waupaca and continues to offer rich programs there. Neil was awarded the Distinguished Alumni award by St Olaf College in 1988 for founding and directing the Academy which provides a learning center dedicated to educational outreach. Neil was also a member of the Winchester Area Historical Society and acted as the contributing editor for its monthly newsletter - "Around the Hill". He recently started German and Norwegian language and culture classes currently held at the Historical Society.

Neil loved to travel with his family. This past summer he and Marie traveled to Norway with their grandchildren, to visit relatives and to expose them their rich Norwegian heritage.

Neil is survived by his wife Marie who lives in Winchester. Also surviving are son James and his wife Kathy in Champaign, IL, son Brian and his wife Sharon in Lawton, MI, daughter Jane and husband Brian Murphy in Westby, WI, and son John and wife Miwa living in Salt Lake City. Grandchildren Laura Eckstein and Brian Eckstein live in Champaign, IL and Nina Eckstein and Jamie Eckstein live in Salt Lake City.

A Funeral Service for Neil will be held on Tuesday, March 15, 2011, at 11:00 a.m. at Grace Lutheran Church of Winchester, Larsen, Wisconsin. Burial with military honors will follow in the Grace Lutheran Cemetery. A Visitation for family and friends will be on Monday, March 14, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the CHURCH and will continue on Tuesday from 9:30 a.m. until the time of the service.

In lieu of flowers, memorials will be established in Neil's name for Grace Lutheran Church, Winchester Area Historical Society, and the Winchester Academy.

The family especially appreciates the care Neil received from doctors, nurses and other staff members at Theda Clark Medical Center.

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