

AU community remembers Klingensmith

3/05/04

Dr. Clarence Klingensmith, 88, emeritus professor of chemistry at Alfred University, died Tuesday, Feb. 24, at his home at 1981 Hanneman Road, Alfred Station. His family was with him. Born January 1, 1916, in Warren, OH, he was a son of William and Alverta Klingensmith. He grew up on the family farm in Leavittsburgh, OH. Dr. Klingensmith took great pleasure in recounting details of farm life and routine. The sense of simplicity and self-reliance that he grew up with remained with him throughout his life. He entered Capitol University in 1932, and received his B.S. degree in 1936. He received a graduate assistantship in organic chemistry from The Ohio State University, specializing in the synthesis of an unknown carbohydrate derivative, and received his Ph.D. in 1939. Dr. Klingensmith worked for Eastman Kodak from 1939 to 1941, and while there met his future wife, the former Margaret Marie Lange. Their marriage was delayed, however, by World War II. Dr. Klingensmith was granted Conscientious Objector status and was assigned to Civilian Public Service (CPS) from June 1941 until November 1945. During the following year, 1945-46, he worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, continued his research on economically feasible methods of rodent control that he had started while in CPS. In March 1946, he was offered a "temporary" position at Alfred University, teaching inorganic chemistry. Dean Alfred E. Whitford offered Dr. Klingensmith the appointment, and Dr. Paul Saunders, chairman of the chemistry department, welcomed him to AU in a letter that read, "Of course, Alfred is a small place, out in the country, but most of us like it very much. We think we have an agreeable student body and faculty, and I am pretty sure that you will like them and us." Dr. Klingensmith apparently found Alfred to be an agreeable place, because when he was offered a full-time position the following semester, at an annual salary of \$2,400, he accepted the offer. He and Margaret were married June 12, 1946, and settled in Alfred, where they raised their family. After her children were grown, Mrs. Klingensmith joined the staff of Herrick Library and worked there until her retirement June 30, 1981. She died December 12, 2001. Dr. and Mrs. Klingensmith were among the original members of the Alfred Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends when it was founded more than 50 years ago. He served as clerk and was active in their social justice efforts in migrant worker camps in the 1960s and at the State Correctional Facility in Attica, attending Friends' Meetings in the prison regularly during the 1980s and 1990s. He served for many years on committees of the Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting and in the New York Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends. Equally involved in the Friends' activities for peace, Dr. Klingensmith was a lifelong pacifist. Throughout his life, Dr. Klingensmith loved chemistry, botany, ornithology and music, and shared those passions with his friends and colleagues. "The life of Clarence Klingensmith epitomized the concept of non-violence," recalled Dr. Robert Pipal, professor of chemistry at AU. "Much of his life was devoted to peaceful approaches to the coexistence of humanity with itself and with nature. His love of birds, which really was only one aspect of his love of the natural world, was contagious. One could not help but feel more at peace with the world when in his presence. I shall never forget a comment made by Harvey Paige, a former colleague in the Division of Chemistry. Harvey said that if Clarence came home one day and found a stranger sawing up the back porch for firewood, Clarence would calmly say something such as 'Rather than sawing up the porch, why don't we go cut down some trees on my property in the country?' There would be no anger. There would merely be the peaceful, non-violent approach to resolving the problem." Clarence was a dedicated and knowledgeable chemist," said Dr. Pipal. "His attention to detail was acute. He fully understood that the creation of new knowledge in the sciences often required many years of repetitive experimentation and careful, consistent data collection. He was curious, inventive in the lab, and like all true scientists willing to learn throughout his professional career. His work with the National Atmospheric Deposition Program (a national acid rain monitoring effort) from the mid 1980's until about two years ago is testament to his dedication and his interest in making this a better world for future generations." "Of course there was his life long fascination with birds," Dr. Pipal added. "He was a birder's birder. He was not particularly interested in his life list of species seen as some bird watchers are. Instead he was interested in birds as co-inhabitants of this fascinating, complex, but finite planet on which all of us must live. He knew their appearance, their songs, their habits, and their habitat. Birding with Clarence was a joy, a real celebration of life." Dr. Klingensmith was an active member of the Allegany County Bird Club, participating in all its activities including the local and national bird counts. He was involved in the Atlas Breeding Bird Survey; and preparing bird skins for study; and researching the effects of mercury on birds. Another colleague, Dr. Wes Bentz, professor of chemistry, said, "Clarence was my mentor and friend from the day I arrived at Alfred. We team-taught general chemistry for several years. He always had an interesting story to

make important points and it was fun to see the twinkle in his eye as he was teaching the material he loved. The year before he retired in 1980, I attended each of his classes in inorganic chemistry. What an experience! I learned so much that year that I have tried to pass on in the years since. "He was a gentle man, liked by everyone. A mutual friend recalls talking with Clarence after his son Sam was killed at Tulane. Clarence was saddened by the event, but not angry at anyone or anything. That was so typical of him. We don't often have the opportunity to see such true dignity of the human spirit. I never heard Clarence raise his voice in anger or frustration. Myers Hall is just not the same without his friendship and wise counsel."After retirement, Dr. Klingensmith developed an interest in water chemistry and operated the area's National Atmospheric Deposition Program acid rain monitoring station, faithfully making the 50-mile round trip to Jasper at least once a week, sometimes more often, testing a sample after each rainfall. He recruited Dr. Peter Finlay, professor emeritus of biology, to help in 1986, and then other members of the AU Chemistry Division, who continue Dr. Klingensmith's work today. Music was also important to Dr. Klingensmith, who played viola with the Hornell Symphony and the Alfred University Chamber Orchestra. He played with AU orchestra until last year, although he switched, at his own request, from playing viola to "last violin." He was also involved with the Wee Playhouse in Alfred for many years. Dr. Klingensmith is survived by three children, Laurie Klingensmith of Albuquerque, NM; Anne Klingensmith (Mike Lakin) of Ithaca; and Mark (Kasey) Klingensmith of Alfred; five grandchildren; and a sister, Alta Calvin of Berkeley, CA. He was predeceased by a son, Samuel. Information about Dr. Klingensmith's memorial service will be announced later.