

A Biographical Sketch of Thomas M. Burton

Especially Concerning His Love of Learning and Life-long Pursuit of It

By Jeanne F. Burton and Carol Burton Muzzy

Thomas Marlin Burton's love of learning, especially history, began in a high school history class whose teacher exuded a love of history, kindling a flame in Tom's mind and heart. He would have majored in history in college, but was pressured by his father, an independent grocery store owner, to major in business. Tom's mediocre grades reflected his disinterest, and working in the college business office exacerbated it.

After graduation, Tom got a job in the office of a grain company, but World War II was on the horizon, and the call for college graduates to train to become officers in the military drew him to the Marine Corps Schools in Quantico, Virginia. The strict regimen there permitted little time for reading or church.

But that changed upon his transfer to the Marine Corps base in San Diego, California. To his delight he found the First Baptist Church, and the City Library just one block away from it. He frequented both often. At this point in his life he felt settled enough to start thinking about marriage, and where better to find a righteous woman than at the library or the church? So he began attending both, pursuing his love of history at one, and his growing interest in marriage at the other. At the church he met and married Jeanne F. Smith, the pastor's daughter.

In December of 1941, as a Marine Corps aviator in the Pacific, Tom was sent to Palmyra Island, where a required total blackout made reading impossible at night, but during off-duty daytime hours he read what history books or historical novels he could find in the very limited library. Here he began exploring the possibilities provided by correspondence courses. When he took the first one is unknown, but he took twelve college level history courses over his forty years of full-time employment: twenty years as a Marine Corps officer, and twenty years as Business Manager, then Investments Manager, at Wheaton College. He also took some business courses to update his knowledge in this long-neglected area.

Tom's request for reduced work hours during his last year at Wheaton College was granted so that he could pursue an advanced degree in history at Northern Illinois University. He was by far the oldest person in his classes, but was admired and helped by several professors there. Long hours of night driving did not deter him, and were rewarded by a Master of Arts degree. After a few more years and a doctoral thesis, he was awarded a PhD in English History at the age of 70. (His thesis was based on secret documents from the late



1600s, which were signed by seven English lords who conspired to dethrone King James II.)

This ended his formal pursuit of history, but his interest never ended until a few years before his death when macular degeneration reduced his ability to read. He taught several of his grandchildren history. He especially mentored grandson Jake Muzzy, to whom he passed on his love of learning and enthusiasm for history while teaching him American History, English History, and Ancient Greek history. For Jake he wrote a book (unpublished) entitled *English History for a Young American*, an excellent text on that subject for young people.

Personal note from Carol Muzzy, former Greenhouse Grammar-level History and Literature teacher and Dean of Grammar and Logic:

When I began homeschooling in the early 1980s, it was uncharted territory. My parents may have had misgivings, but to me they were unfailingly supportive. My father would often say to me, "You're doing a great job with your kids." Every homeschooling parent needs to hear those words! I believe my father's own unusual educational journey made him aware that what is important in educating children is that they are truly learning and loving it. He inspired me as an educator, and his legacy continues in his descendants, many of whom have been part of Greenhouse: four grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, and probably more to come.

The Thomas M. Burton Scholarship Fund provides tuition assistance at Greenhouse Christian Co-School for families who might not otherwise be able to attend.