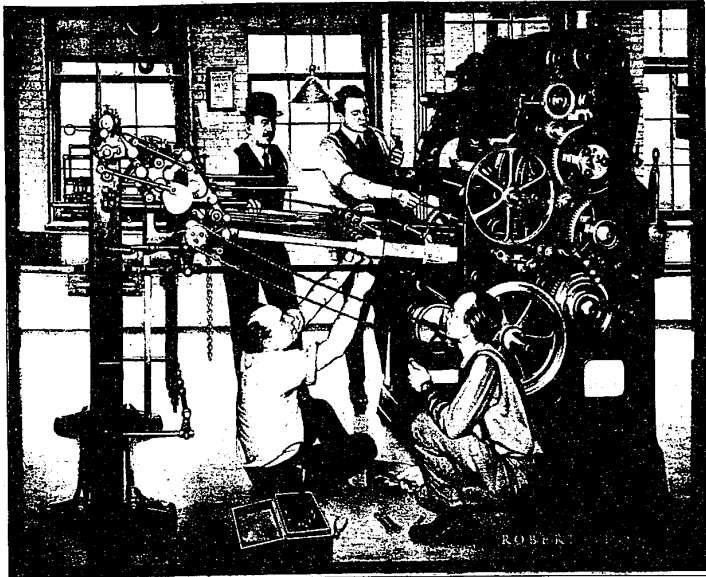


Communications through history were depicted in a series of 24 paintings including the one at right.



For his wildlife series, Robert Thom did research on Kodiak Island, in British Columbia, Colorado and Africa. He is pictured in his studio in 1975 working on the series.

'Man with a heart' leaves legacy of art

By CORINNE ABATT

Robert Thom in a 1963 interview in *The Eccentric* gave a prophetic quote. "A man shouldn't walk through life without leaving some foot prints, and I want mine to be good traces."

Thom and his wife, Helen, both died after an auto accident in Alena on Dec. 29. His traces, however, remain clear indications of his skill as an artist and his desire to contribute to the Birmingham community in which he spent many years.

In the years when the Thom family lived in Bloomfield Township his impact on Birmingham-Bloomfield was highly visible.

When City Commissioner William E. Roberts introduced Thom as a speaker at the Birmingham Junior Chamber of Commerce banquet in 1964, Roberts called Thom, "The conscience of Birmingham. An original thinker. A leader rather than a rider. A man with a heart — a heart for Birmingham and its people."

WHILE THOM HELD many positions of leadership in the community — he served as president of the Birmingham Rotary in 1963, and as president of the Community House for several terms in the early '60s — much of his energy was directed toward improving the art climate of the area.

He was one of the founders and first president of the Bloomfield Art Association, later renamed the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association. In 1969, he opened an art gallery in the Merrillwood Mall.

In 1951, when he was 36-years-old and his family had lived in Foxcroft in Bloomfield Township for about a year, he was commissioned to do "A History of Pharmacy in Pictures" by Parke-Davis Company. Thom spent several years researching the history of medicine, even traveling to Europe to study before he completed 29 paintings in 1954.

When he was elected to the New York Society of Illustrators in 1954, it was in recognition of the pharmacy series as well as for the Americanism series he did for Behn Alumnium.

Helen Thom worked with her husband in the research for the pharmacy series. The series was shown in Detroit in 1967.

At the time he was doing these commissions, Thom was a working commercial artist with a studio in Detroit. He had opened his own studio in 1945 after working in the art department of the Chevrolet Division of General Motors. He closed the commercial studio in 1954 to devote all his time to the historical series.

Thom received a major commission from Michigan Bell Telephone Co. in 1963 to do a series on Michigan history. F. Clever Bald, then director of the Michigan Historical Collections at the University of Michigan and author of "Michigan in Four Centuries," worked with Thom as historical consultant.

The 36 paintings in the Michigan history series, which Thom scheduled himself to do at the rate of six a year, began with the woolly mastodons who roamed Michigan 11,000 years ago. The series covered the Indians and the occupations and troubles of the French

and British up to the construction of the Mackinac Bridge.

One of the most popular in the series was "Putting the World on Wheels," a scene at the corner of Randolph and Monroe in Detroit in 1913.

The history of Michigan series was widely shown and Thom frequently gave slide presentations of the work for local groups, spicing up his commentaries with what came to be known as "Thomisms."

AT THAT 1964 Jaycee meeting, he suggested a promotional book that would tell the world about Birmingham, by saying, "Who's going to do it? Not the old guys. This is something that youth can accomplish."

"Tomorrow is yours, fellas. Make of it what you will."

At that same gathering he said, "This is an era of confusion — we can't separate fact from fiction. Never take only one person's statements as the truth on any one thing."

In 1970, Thom was commissioned by the American Bakers Association to do

an oil painting. The result, called "Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread," showed a family gathered around the dinner table with heads bowed and hands folded in prayer.

For models, Thom used his wife Nellie (Helen), himself, his grandson Billy, and Mr. and Mrs. Parker Bogue and their daughter Lisa. At the head of the table as the Patriarch was the late George R. Averill, former publisher of *The Eccentric*. Thom said he chose Averill because "he was the perfect grandfather type."

Thom had opened his Birmingham gallery by the time the painting was completed in 1971. The original was presented to President Richard Nixon.

When he completed a 24-painting series for Kimberly Clarke Corporation, "Graphic Communications through History," Thom began a wildlife series in 1972. Like the previous communications series, this also required extensive travel to produce the authentic, exacting detail for which he had become internationally known.



An automobile accident New Year's weekend ended the career of world-renowned artist Robert Thom, shown in a 1966 picture.

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

AS ANGLES WATCHES Farmington pass by its window all bundled up against the snow and wind, IA notes that the employees at Farmington Hills' building department are already keeping a countdown on spring. On the counter in the Hills' administration building, the building employees have posted a sign keeping passers-by posted on the number of days until winter becomes a memory. The sign, appropriately enough, is propped up on a vase-full of daisies.

WRITE, WRITE, WRITE those letters. And if you need extra impetus to scribble those lines to a friend, the Postal Service (who else?) is sponsoring National Letter Writing Week from Feb. 24-March 1. The week, according to the Postal Service public relations department, is intended to "focus on the power of the written word and letter writing to shape opinions, preserve memories, lift spirits and link people and to encourage more personal correspondence." The PO encourages school activities with a 64 page book "All About Letters" and the issue of a special three pair set of U.S. postage stamps. (IA can hardly wait for all those cards and letters to come pouring into it's mailbox. But IA can't help but suspect that National Letter Writing Week is a great way to sell stamps after the holiday slump.)

KISS YOUR BABY week is coming up during the week of Feb. 10. It's sponsored by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. If your baby tastes salty (yes, that's right, salty) check it out—it could be a sign of CF.

SO YOU WANT to make a solar heater? The Detroit Science Center will show a film illustrating the principle of solar energy application at 1, 2 and 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in its demonstrations theater at 5020 John R. in Detroit. For further information call the center at 833-1892.

OCC'S ORCHARD RIDGE campus presents James J. Mapes demonstrating mind control and ESP at 1 p.m. Jan. 21 in H Building multi-purpose room on campus. For further information, persons who have problems reading IA's mind can call 476-9400, ext. 500 or 501.

FARMINGTON HILLS police department employee Lavonne Roberts has an early Valentine sitting on her desk. One of the persons who help the public get copies of their accident reports, Ms. Roberts has a large framed color photo of James Gardner on her desk. A big JG fan, she'll only say that the photo was a gift from a friend. IA's truly amazed by her ability to recite the camera commercials featuring television's former Maverick.

LOOKING FOR A CLASS? Try calling the following organizations and ask for their winter catalogs: Farmington Community Center, 477-8404; Mercy Center, 476-8016; Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation, 474-6115; Farmington YMCA, 553-4020; Ten Mile Community School, 676-5233.

ANGLES WONDERS why the clock on top of the Farmington Road section of the Downtown Farmington Center hasn't worked in a while. Angles catches itself looking up at the clock to check the time.

OAKLAND SINGLES haven't a thing in common with Kraft's Singles. The Oakland group of singles between 23-40-years-old will meet at 8 p.m. Jan. 13 in the Farmington Hills Steak and Ale, on 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Road at the Orchard Lake exit of I-696. There will be a mixture of rock and disco music. Proper attire is requested. (Leave those tags at home) There is a \$3 charge at the door.

FOR THOSE WHO would rather square dance than disco, lessons will begin from 7:30-9:30 p.m. on Jan. 16 in Ten Mile Community School, 32789 Ten Mile in Farmington. The class will meet for eight weeks on Wednesday evenings. Fee is \$20 per couple. For more information call 553-3270. Chuck McClelland will be calling.

TELEPHONE CONNECTIONS

To connect with the Farmington Observer use the following numbers:

- Staff — 477-5450
- Delivery — 591-0500
- Classifieds — 591-0900
- Display Ads — 591-2300
- Legal Ads — 591-2300

MAIL IT TO US

Want to become a complete angler? Have a line on an inside angle? Give IA a call or send Angles a letter. Dial 477-5450 or slap 13 cents on an envelope addressed to IA, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024. Allow at least one week before publication. All material becomes the property of the Farmington Observer. Sorry, Angles won't use photos. IA believes 1,000 words are preferable to one picture.



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