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WILLIAM J. GEDNEY

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Thomas W. Gething
University of Washington
Department of Asian Languages and Literature
Seattle WA 98195

A member of the Society for many years and honorary member since 1984, William J. Gedney died on November 14, 1999. Gedney, a man greatly admired by his colleagues and deeply respected by his students, spent his seven cycles of life in vigorous pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

Gedney, perhaps more than any other scholar, built the field of Thai linguistics in the U.S. by his research and by his teaching. His expertise, moreover, extended to the Tai family of languages and his published collections and works over a half century can be said to have opened significant areas of the study of Tai to the scholarly world.

With an undergraduate degree from Whitman College (1935) he began his professional career as a secondary school teacher. During World War II he was one of the draftees who were assigned to duty with the U.S. Army language unit in New York. It was there that he began his study of Thai and undertook additional academic work that led to his doctorate from Yale University (1947). Gedney made the first of his numerous visits to Thailand in 1947, staying for seven years during which time he immersed himself in Thai culture and the Thai language, working as a translator and studying with Thai experts and scholars. Gedney held appointments at the State University of New York in New Paltz and subsequently at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. At the time of his death he was a University of Michigan Professor Emeritus.

The impact of William Gedney on Thai studies in the U.S. can perhaps be measured best in the lives of the many students who learned

from him. He taught undergraduate students and graduate students in linguistics, he oversaw early U.S. Peace Corps training programs for volunteers to Thailand, and his publications on Tai languages ranging from Thailand to China, Laos, and Vietnam reached countless others who never met him, but nevertheless learned from him. Gedney's disciples are found in many fields of endeavor and the students he trained are working throughout the world, demonstrating the analytical skills he inculcated in them and the cultural sensitivity he modeled for them. His is a legacy that is rich with the acumen and insights that he himself embodied.

In addition to his enormous research output and his extensive teaching for nearly three decades, Gedney served his profession ably, as an active member and participant in the Linguistic Society of America, the Association for Asian Studies, the Southeast Asian Linguistic Society, the American Oriental Society of which he was vice president and president, and the Siam Society. He was, in addition, chairman of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Michigan in the mid-1970's.

As mentor and exemplar Gedney and his wife, the late Choy Manachip Gedney, are remembered with great admiration and affection for their hospitality and generosity. Together the Gedneys imparted values and wisdom that have assured their places in the memories of countless people with whom their lives intersected. A fund in William Gedney's memory has been established at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in Ann Arbor, Michigan to recognize student accomplishment in the area of Thai studies.