

resolutions of respect

Henry J. Oosting 1903-1968

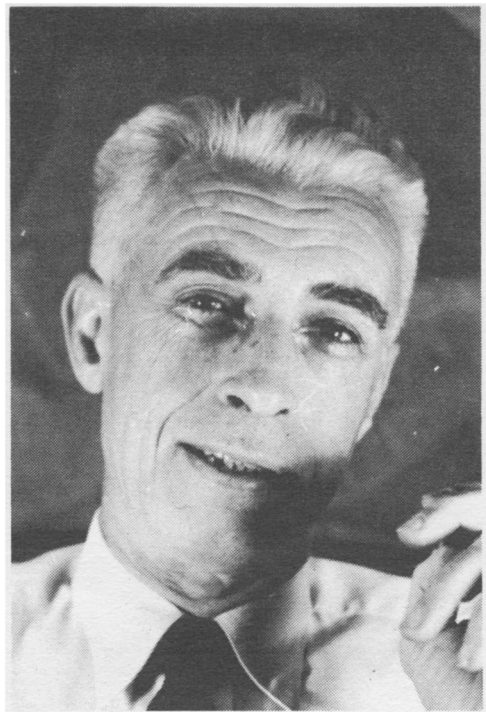
Henry John Oosting—"Heinie" or "The Chief" to all his many friends—was born in Holland, Michigan, on March 12, 1903. He was educated there by his parents and teachers in the old Dutch tradition of excellence, service, and hard work. Hope College, Michigan State University, and the University of Minnesota led him into botany, then to the new field of ecology and his Ph.D. degree under Professor William S. Cooper.

In a happy and fortunate circumstance, he came to Duke University in 1932 accepting the offer of Professor H.L. Blomquist to be the ecologist in the new Department of Botany. It is difficult to imagine what ecology at Duke would have been without him. With him, through his ideals of excellence, service, and work, Duke's ecology program developed through the years into one of the best—and one of the most enjoyable. As one of his first students, I was privileged to come under his influence and guidance and to learn some of his ways of achieving excellence in teaching, research and writing. His devotion to service for others and hard work produced a solid foundation for his ecological program. This program did not come into existence overnight. It took almost twenty years of great efforts on his part before the momentum began to be self-perpetuating. All during this time, he carried the burdens on his own shoulders. Serious illness in the early 1950's slowed down his field work but not his teaching, advising, editing, writing, and eventually administration. He was able to see his efforts rewarded as fine students trained by him went out into professional ecology at a time of environmental deterioration when they, too, could be of service.

One of Heinie's attributes as a great teacher was his natural sympathy for all students. We hear much today of some lack of communication between generations and often between professors and students. There never was lack of communication between Heinie and any of his students—dialogue went on throughout the day and night. He was *always* available to advise and help and he enjoyed it. Perhaps he gave his

time and effort too much so for his own well-being but that availability of his sympathetic ear was one of the things that made him a great teacher and a wonderful human being. And it was not only the students who took advantage of his wise advice and counsel—his colleagues at Duke and in the Ecological Society did this many times through the years. He never isolated himself from people and people always gathered around the table with him at coffee breaks and lunch time. Much of his teaching was done in this informal way. We all learned much from him during spontaneous gatherings in the lab, in the field, and in Heinie and Cornelia Oosting's always-open home where the party was never over until the Chief gave the piano a good work-out.

What was the result of all of this teaching—formal and informal? It is impossible to measure or to know his total impact on the thousands of students from the new freshman to the doctoral candidate but one thing is certain: none ever forgot him or will, and that is some measure. Numbers in themselves are meaningless but 32 students finished



M.A. degrees and 35 completed their Ph.D. degrees under his firm but benevolent guidance. It was fitting that the Association of Southeastern Biologists gave him its Meritorious Teaching Award in 1967.

One would think that there would have been little or no time left over for research or professional interests. Of course, this was not so. From his first year at Duke, fresh from his limnology of Michigan and Minnesota, he became involved in work on the recovery and environmental changes occurring in the eroded and abandoned land of the Piedmont. After that came the Southern Appalachians, Greenland, and the spruce-fir forests of the north and the western mountains. As time went on, his principal research interests became these boreal and mountain forests and in this area he became one of the world's experts. More than that—in the foggy, cool environment of the mossy subalpine spruce forests of the Smoky Mountains, he was truly at home; we all have memories of him in such clean and unspoiled places.

Faithfully, he worked to promote and help his profession of ecology: his University, his Department of which he was the Chairman for many years, the University Research Council and the North Carolina Academy of Science, both of which he headed. But his greatest professional interest was in the Ecological Society of America. For a number of years, he was Treasurer of the Society, and he held the post of Business Manager until the time of his death on October 30, 1968. In 1955, he served as President of the Society.

Among his many talents was the ability to write clearly and effectively. This is evident not only in his own papers and his "Study of Plant Communities" but also in the publications of his many students. His talents for writing and editing led naturally to the Editorship of Ecological Monographs which he assumed in 1950 and continued through nineteen years. Many an author was aided and encouraged by his kind advice.

It is trite to say that a man such as Heinie Oosting is missed. He is—and greatly so. But his spirit and philosophy continue to live in his students, friends, and colleagues. Ecology and society are better because of what he did.

Dwight Billings