LILLIAN ERIKSON THORSON

I was born in Bear Park township February 9, 1893, to Johanna and Erik Erikson, who immigrated to America from Orebro, Yestromland, Sweden, with their daughters: Hannah, five years old; Hulda, three years old; and Agnes, one year old; November 10, 1880. They homesteaded on the land now known as the Bergeson Nursery, east of Fertile. Mother planted the first apple trees on that land, one of which flourished and bore fruit for many years. This was told to me by Mrs. Bergeson, whose parents, the Ole Johnsons, later bought the farm. I was one and one-half years old when we moved from the homestead to the Sand Hill Farm southeast of Fertile, and six years old when I started walking the one and a half miles to school in Fertile. After five years, we moved to Fertile. Memories of family activities of those early pioneer days on the homestead are related in a separate account by my sister, Julia Erikson Michelsen.

I graduated from Fertile High School in 1912, and the next year entered Thomas Normal Training School in Detroit, Michigan, a private school specializing in teacher training for domestic art and science, music, manual training, physical education and art. This school later became part of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Particularly vivid in my memory of these Detroit years are recollections of many thrilling concerts by world-famous symphonies and artists such as Paderewski and Melba. In three years I graduated from Thomas Normal and then because of added state requirements, returned to Minnesota where I trained nine months more at St. Cloud State College, graduating in March, 1916. I went to Cromwell to fill a vacancy which occurred that spring.

During the summer and fall of 1916, I was hired to help organize and equip the first home economics department in the new Fisher High School, and in January, 1917, started the first classes. I stayed on through 1918-19. In 1919, the new agriculture and manual training teacher, Ted W. Thorson, arrived in Fisher just out of the Navy in World War I. He had been band master on the “U.S. New Jersey” while overseas, and it wasn’t long before he was organizing music groups in addition to his teaching. In May we became engaged and were married on August 18, 1920. We moved to Fertile, Minnesota, in 1921, and lived there until 1929. During this time our three children were born: Ted Jr. in 1922; Marilyn in 1923, and Keith in 1925. In Fisher and Fertile I served on local church committees and participated in community activities as Girl Scout Leader, 1918-19, charter member of the Fertile Study Club, and charter member and president of the Fertile American Legion Auxiliary No. 238.

In 1929 we moved to Crookston. Community and professional service has included: American Lutheran Church Women, past president; American Legion Auxiliary No. 20, past president; Current Events Club and Matron’s Club, past president; Order of Eastern Star (Worthy Matron); Member, Board of Directors of the American Red Cross, Polk County (four years); Trinity Lutheran Church Welfare Board, West Polk County (three years); membership drives, Civic Music League, for many years; taught home economics at St. Joseph’s for eight years; taught foods and nutrition for Crookston Public Schools-Bethesda Hospital Nursing Program (ten years); during World War II, member of Trinity Lutheran Church Refugee Sewing Groups, Red Cross Nurse’s Aide, and 12-hour course Civil Defense “Citation”; Member, Crookston Garden Club; Riverview Sewing Guild; Senior Citizen’s Club; County Fair judge with Rete Bede of the Northwest School of Agriculture (eight years); pioneer couple, 1973, pioneer week, Crookston, Minnesota.

T. W. THORSON “MR. MUSIC” (1894-1973)

Theodore Wilhelm Thorson was born October 14, 1894, and raised on a farm in Sibley county, Minnesota. His parents were Anna Bengston Thorson and Torkel Thorson. He graduated from Winthrop High School in 1912 and the University of Minnesota (Agriculture) in 1916. He served in the United States Navy from 1917 to 1919 as musician and bandmaster. He taught agriculture at Fisher, Minnesota, during initial beef planting and experimentation from 1919-1922. He reorganized and directed the Fisher Community Band, and also the Fisher-Bygland Octette which sang at the Crookston Winter Shows in 1920. This octette was the forerunner of the 175 voice Northwestern Singers Association, organized by T. W. and his brother, N. A. Thorson in 1921. This group, directed by T. W., gave annual concerts at the Winter Shows from 1922 to 1942.

On August 18, 1920, T. W. married Lillian Erikson, home economics teacher at Fisher. They moved to Fertile in 1921 and became associated with the Erikson Produce business. Three children were born there: Ted Jr., 1922, Marilyn, 1923, and Keith in 1925. Thorson reorganized the Fertile City Band, directed the high school band and also started the first high school bands in Erskine and Mentor. He directed the Odin Male Chorus and the Concordia Church Choir. In 1925, he organized and directed the Fertile Choral Society, 210 voices and an orchestra of 30, in four spring concerts. He also served as barber for two years and as city council for three years. In 1929, he accepted the position as director of the Crookston Municipal Band and his family moved to Crookston.

Crookston (1929-1973) Mr. Thorson directed the city Municipal Band from 1929 to 1959. He taught over 1,600 beginners on instruments during Saturday lessons from 1929 to 1958. He directed Trinity Lutheran Senior Choir from 1929 to 1970. He organized and directed Soprano Characteristic Band in 1928 — four times State Champions. He served as music director of the Crookston Legion Auxiliary Drum and Bugle Corps — five times State Champions.

In 1932, T. W. accepted the position of supervisor of music in the Crookston Public Schools. He formed the a cappella choir and directed orchestra and band for 28 years. He instigated memory song contests in the grade schools and started a music council which has functioned since 1934. He helped establish the Farden and Carey Music awards to encourage students to do better work. He served as a member of the Minnesota State Music League Executive Committee for six years. He also served as president of the Crookston Educational Association in 1943-44. He organized the girls’ Drum and Bugle Corps, which became Crookston’s “Ambassadors of Good Will.”

From 1929 to 1969, T. W. directed the annual presentation of the Good Friday Cantata, “The Seven Last Words of Christ”, given by combined church choirs and orchestra.

After his retirement from the public schools in 1959, he toured England, Europe and Russia. He remained active in community affairs. During 1961-62, he was president of both the Crookston Rotary Club and the Civic Music League. In the 1960’s, he served as chairman of the Music and Liturgy Commission of the American Lutheran Church. He served on the first Board of Directors of the International Music Camp at the Peace Gardens in North Dakota. He was active in the affairs of the Polk County Historical Society until his death. He was selected as a music judge at seven National Legion