JOHN WILLIAM REITH
"He joined the USC faculty in 1948 and was both an author and lecturer." This simple statement in the Torrance Press Herald, August 23, 1967, announcing that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors had adjourned in memory of the death of John W. (Jack) Reith, August 9 at Mount Sinai Hospital after a long illness with cancer does not begin to tell the story of Jack's nineteen years of contributions to the field of geography, the growth and development of his students, and his efforts to build a strong geography program in the University of Southern California curriculum.

Jack was born March 22, 1914, in Lancaster, Pa., attended Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, 1935-37, completing the B.Sc. in Education at Millersville (Pa.) State College in 1938, and his M.A. in Geography at Clark University in 1941. His thesis topic, "Agricultural Land Use of West Earl Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania," was part of Jack's specialization in economic geography and resource utilization along with a continuing strong interest in geographic education.

In 1941-42 Jack was a Junior Assistant Librarian at the Library of Congress where he met Gertrude Louise McKean and married her shortly after his induction into the army. From 1942-45 he served with the Office of Strategic Services (China-Central Burma-India-Burma Theaters). After his discharge with the rank of staff sergeant he was a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Geography, University of Washington, 1945-46. He then held the post of Instructor, Department of Geography, Northwestern University, 1946-48, and completed his Ph.D. in that department in 1949 with a dissertation on the "Decline of Coal Mining in the Danville District, Illinois: Its Causes and Effects." In 1948 he joined the staff of USC as the first chairman of the Geography Department. He held this position from 1948-63 and 1965 until his death, rising from Visiting Assistant Professor to Professor. During these years he actively participated in many student, faculty, and university affairs. Jack also took an active part in his community, particularly in the Boy Scout program. His interest in scouting started as a youth, during which he achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, and was renewed as his son John Herbert entered the movement.

Perhaps best known for his frequently acrid tongue and his off-and-on beard, Jack enjoyed social affairs, bridge, science fiction, and golf but was particularly fond of photography and camping and fishing with his wife and children, G. Helen and John Herbert. Divorced in 1965, he married Lillian R. Carter in 1965. He is survived by his widow, daughter, and son.

Jack was also active in professional associations. He served as Chairman, Association of American Geographers Committee on Geographers in Business, 1956-60; as a member of the National Council for Geographic Education Committee on Teacher Preparation and Certification, 1952-54, State Coordinator with the California Council of Geography Teachers, 1955-57, and Publications committee, 1955-58; as Chairman of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers 1951 Annual Meeting Local Arrangements Committee, as Vice-President, 1957-58, and on the Constution Revi-
sion Committee, 1953. He also served as Chairman of the California Council of Geography Teachers Planning Committee on Teacher Education in Geography, 1951-53 and as a member of the Executive Board, 1953-57. His most extensive leadership was to the Los Angeles Geographical Society which he helped establish and served as Vice President, 1952-56, President, 1957-60, Member of the Council, 1960-61, Chairman, of the Television Committee, 1953-57, Tour Committee member, 1953-57, Chairman Honors Committee, 1955-58, Chairman, Nominating Committee, 1962, and Chairman, Arrangements and Master of Ceremonies, Tenth Annual Meeting, 1963. In addition he presented a number of papers and participated in or chaired several panels at professional meetings.

Of his many extra-curricular professional activities, Jack was probably the most proud of and received the greatest satisfaction from directing a National Science Foundation In-Service Institute in Physical Geography for Teachers at USC in 1961-62. He also derived much gratification from presenting “The Changing World,” a series of 32 lectures in the USC Odyssey television series, 1963. Other special activities included serving as Treasurer and Planning Committee Member of the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Conservation Conference, 1958, and of the Southern California Natural Resources Conference, 1960 (both at USC): as a Consultant, Eaton Canyon Nature Study Center; Participant, National Science Foundation Summer Institute on Quantitative Methods in Geography, North-University, 1962; and as Consultant for textbook selection, Armed Forces Institute, 1962. He was also a Manuscript Editor of the Journal of the West, 1962-64, and Associate Editor of the California Information Almanac, 1964-66.

Jack’s publications include:


"Introduction to Physical Geography" (tape recording), Los Angeles, Campus World, Inc., 1959.


"Los Angeles," Focus, XIII, No. 9, May 1962 (with David W. Lantis).


California Information Almanac (Associate Editor, Lakewood, California, California Information Almanac, 1965).

His professional memberships included Fellow, Royal Geographical Society; Fellow, American Geographical Society; Fellow, National Council for Geographic Education; Association of American Geographers; California Council of Geography Teachers; Association of Pacific Coast Geographers; Los Angeles Geographical Society; Sigma Xi; American Association for the Advancement of Science; Gamma Theta Upsilon; and Delta Phi Epsilon. He was also a member of the Lambda Chi Alpha social fraternity and Blue Key.

Jack will be missed by his family, colleagues, and students and many other friends.

William H. Wake
Bakersfield Center,
Fresno State College