

For her achievements as a teacher of music, Alma Swinton won admiration and acclaim. Once president of the Michigan Federation of Music Clubs, at age 84 she received an honor citation from the Michigan Cultural Commission which warmed her heart. Though the distance from Marquette to Flint, Michigan, prevented her from being at the presentation, she was greeted by a telegram from Governor Romney as well as a check from the Mott Foundation for her outstanding contribution as a musician and teacher. The following year Northern Michigan University selected her to receive its Arts Recognition Award at the spring concert. "I was much touched," she later wrote, "and could not speak." Though she was proud of these honors, no reward pleased her more than the accomplishments of her students. A revered teacher, she stimulated many pupils to advanced teaching and concert performance.

In addition to going abroad for music lessons, Alma travelled widely and eagerly until she was past eighty--frequently to Europe, to Mexico and South America; in 1959, at the age of eighty, she made a world tour which took her to Spain and Portugal, Greece and Turkey, to India, Ceylon and Nepal, and to China and Japan. Her last trip was a Mediterranean cruise when she was eighty-four. During these trips she took thousands of pictures which she enjoyed showing to friends and relatives, and particularly to the school children of Marquette, whose laborious thank-you notes delighted her.

And Alma Williams Swinton was tireless also as a writer. Her interest in writing came late in life. At the age of eighty and again at eighty-five, she took summer creative writing courses at Northern Michigan University. Though her interest came too late to allow her time to perfect it as she had her piano teaching, and, as she said, she had not the patience to write and rewrite to achieve acceptance by publishers, the fact that she could, though in her seventies and eighties, write I Married a Doctor and two collections of short sketches--Tales My Mother Told Me and Teen-Age Stories--testifies to her tremendous energy and her talent for telling a story. During her last years she worked feverishly to preserve the past of Michigan's "Copper Country" and to preserve her heritage from Vermontville and the Benedict family. She could never give up her music teaching, but she was determined to finish writing her Vermontville and Ontonagon stories before she died, and she succeeded in spite of painful arthritis and an ailing heart, though death did prevent her finishing stories of her childhood years in Paris. She died April 25, 1965, at the age of eighty-six.

Only for the last few weeks was Alma to experience what she dreaded most--inactivity. Two weeks before she died she gave a music lesson and she was planning future recitals as well. Imposing in appearance, Alma Williams Swinton was tender, sparkling with wit, and magnanimous. No one will ever know how many things she did for people. She was a faithful supporter of Wellesley College, of the Interlochen National Music Camp for which she set up a scholarship fund, of the Big Bay Camp for retarded boys, and of the Episcopal Church. She constantly assisted able music students, people in need, and friends embarking on a trip or venture. Though deeply rooted in the past she was vitally interested in the present and the future as long as she lived.

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