

Winthrop Clark "Tad" Chapman

April 4, 1915 – December 15, 1996

Winthrop Clark "Tad" Chapman, a former South Dakota School for the Deaf pupil whose achievements brought national attention to deafblind education, died December 15, 1996, at age 81. He is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery in Saint James, Minnesota.

Born April 4, 1915, in Alexander, North Dakota, Tad was the son of Dr. Winthrop S. Chapman and Jessie Meeker Chapman. He grew up in Redfield, South Dakota, with his older brother, Tom, and younger sister, Janet. Spinal meningitis left him deaf and blind in early childhood. His parents worked persistently to secure an education and individual instruction for him.



Tad entered the South Dakota School for the Deaf around 1920. Sophia Alcorn began teaching him in January 1921, helping him understand speech by feeling the movements and vibrations of a speaker's face and throat. He learned to speak, read Braille, and type on an ordinary typewriter. The communication method known as Tadoma combines his name with that of Oma Simpson, another pupil taught by Alcorn.

During his SDSD years, Tad frequently demonstrated speech, typing, and arithmetic before civic clubs and community groups. He also enjoyed friendships, family visits, and physical activities, learning to swim at the Sioux Falls YMCA. Teachers Margaret Grady and Inis B. Hall continued his education, while nurse and family friend Amanda Harmening provided lasting care and companionship.



Around 1930, Tad continued his education at Perkins Institution in Watertown, Massachusetts. He graduated from its high school program in June 1938. That year, he traveled to South Africa with his mother and Miss Hall to demonstrate his communication skills and encourage educational opportunities for deafblind people.

After World War II, Tad moved to California near his siblings. Family recollections describe his work with his father in rabbit and chicken businesses, including bookkeeping and daily farm chores. A devoted reader and lifelong student, he continued learning through Hadley correspondence courses and maintained friendships through letters and, later, a Braille telecommunications device.



Music and craftsmanship remained important throughout his life. Tad played piano and organ and enjoyed weaving, knitting, embroidery, pottery, and other handwork. He valued independence and maintained a home of his own with support from relatives and caregivers. In later years, he moved to Washington to live with his nephew George Beavis and his family.



Remembered by his family for his humor, determination, and gratitude, Tad left a lasting place in SDSD history. His name endures in Tadoma, and his life reflects decades of learning, work, creativity, and connection with others.

Historical obituary compiled for the SDAD website from the completed Tad Chapman profile, contemporary newspaper accounts, and Chapman family recollections.