

# Hole taught students to love soil and to love life

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**F**rancis Hole's life was dedicated to teaching us to be aware of life and all its possibilities.

Hole, who died Jan. 15 at 88, was long one of the UW-

Madison's most popular professors — beloved by students and fellow faculty members alike. His



Hole

subject (and his passion) was soil, and he devoted his life to studying it and teaching others to love it as he did. He was so successful as a teacher that students who had no logical reason to take his class did so — and whether they went on to become agronomists or astronomers, farmers or French teachers, they retained Hole's devotion to marvelous, life-sustaining soil.

As a teacher, Hole taught his students to listen with their feet to the dirt

beneath them. As a Quaker, Hole taught himself to listen with his soul to messages from the Divine. Indeed, he called his 1996 diagnosis of prostate cancer "a love letter from the Divine," and added "And I turn to the Divine and I say, " 'It's about time I paid attention to you.' "

To some, Hole will always be remembered as the scientist who pursued his love affair with soil so passionately, he eventually persuaded the Legislature to designate Antigo silt loam as the state dirt. Others will remember the witty teacher who traveled the state with a soil auger and a suitcase full of puppets to share his knowledge and his passion with schoolchildren. Still others remember him as a founding member of the Madison Meeting of Quakers, whose life exemplified his strength of character, his spiritual quest and his devotion to peace, which he has now found.