

George Eric Peabody

July 31, 1896 — July 3, 1967

George Eric Peabody was born in Wayland, New York. The son of a country doctor, much of his early informal education and philosophy of life was gained while accompanying his father on trips throughout the countryside. A broad variety of interests in the fields of literature, psychology, sociology, history, and meteorology were stimulated by his father and these continued throughout his life. His formal education included attending the Bryant-Stratton Business College in Buffalo before entering Cornell University in 1914. Upon receiving the B.S. degree in 1918, he served in the United States Army Quartermaster Corps until the armistice. After working as a salesman, farmer, and druggist, he returned to Cornell in 1921 with an appointment as instructor in oral and written expression. While serving as instructor, he enrolled in the Graduate School and received the M.S. degree in 1924. He was appointed Assistant Professor in 1927 and Professor in 1937.

His forty-three years of teaching were characterized by a sincere interest in and understanding of students. He was an inspiring and challenging teacher in helping thousands of students develop poise, self-confidence and, in his concise words, the ability to “stand up—speak up—and shut up.” His students were encouraged and helped to organize and present their ideas based on a sound knowledge of their material and clear thinking. Inaccurate material or lack of clarity were not tolerated in his classes. His teaching was not confined to the classroom as literally thousands of hours were spent in individual conferences to help students prepare their speeches. He gave particular guidance to contestants in public speaking in the Eastman and Rice Debates. Many of these contestants have become leaders in agriculture, industry, and other fields. His book *How to Speak Effectively* has been the textbook for public speaking classes for many years in the State College of Agriculture and elsewhere.

Because of his keen understanding and sincere interest many students sought his advice and counsel on matters outside the classroom. His door was always open to such students with counsel freely and wisely given. In 1958, students demonstrated their appreciation for his teaching and interest by selecting him for the Professor of Merit Award.

His interest in and concern for students led to his serving as chairman of both the University Faculty Committee on Student Conduct and of the University Faculty Committee on Student Activities. At the end of World War II he also served as assistant director of Veterans Education, where he was able to help many returning veterans adjust to civilian life and obtain a college education.

This interest was also evident in his service on various committees of the College of Agriculture. These included membership on the College Educational Policy Committee, chairman of the Petitions Committee, and chairman of the Scholarship Committee.

His interest and leadership were also recognized by the Ithaca community. His was a life representing the best in “town and gown” relations. His services to the community covered a wide spectrum. He was connected with the Ithaca Community Chest from 1923-48, being major of the drive in 1940 and 1941, program chairman, 1941-48, and member of the board of directors 1942-48. He was chairman of the Tompkins County Red Cross from 1943-47 and a member of the Tompkins County War Council from 1943-45. Elected to the Ithaca Board of Education in 1944, he served until 1953, being vice-president from 1948-53, and acting president for one term. One of his last contributions to the community was to serve as a member of the City Planning Board from August 1962 to January 1964.

Professor Peabody’s other interests, in addition to his devotion to students and the community, included literature (he was an avid reader able to converse intelligently on many subjects), travel with particular interest in the geography of the United States, and medicine where both his father and son were doctors. He had a layman’s rare understanding and knowledge of the field of medicine.

He deemed himself one of the most fortunate of men in having as a source of constant understanding, encouragement, and stimulation his wife, the former Mary Margaret Roche, whom he married on October 25, 1919. Theirs was a very devoted and close relationship.

He was truly a great teacher with the ability to stimulate, challenge, and guide students. He was also a dedicated member of the Ithaca community as evidenced by his many civic leadership contributions. He will be remembered by all who knew him as a warm friend, a source of wise counsel, and a fighter against hypocrisy.

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