



James C. White

October 29, 1916 – October 2, 2018

James Carrick White, professor emeritus in both Food Science and Hotel Administration, died at his home on Cayuga Lake just short of his 102nd birthday. He was born October 29, 1916 in Scobey, Montana.

His trip from Scobey to Cornell took almost 20 years. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, Canada where his father was a homesteader, and found work in major construction projects. During that time, the family moved a total of 13 times, mostly in western Canada, with Jim attending as many different schools. His secondary education greatly improved in 1930, when the family moved east, landing first in Tully, New York and finally in Canastota, New York, where he finished high school. His Math teacher, a Cornell graduate, helped him apply to the College of Agriculture and he entered in the Fall of 1935.

Professor White received his bachelor's degree in 1939 and Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1944, with a major in Bacteriology and minors in Biochemistry and Dairy Science. During his doctoral studies, he worked in the laboratory of Cornell chemist and Nobel laureate Dr. James B. Sumner.

With degree in hand, he spent the next two years as director of research for the Borden Cheese Company, where he was responsible for the sanitation program, as well as the development of new products and research in a large number of food processing plants throughout the East and MidWest. He returned to Cornell in 1946 as an associate professor in the Department of Dairy Industry, with responsibilities in teaching, research, and extension. He became a full professor in 1951.

Dr. White taught courses in Market Milk, Introductory Dairy Chemistry and Food Quality Control, and lectured in the Hotel School, as well as the Colleges of Human Ecology and Veterinary Medicine. In the latter, he teamtaught the Food Inspection Course for Veterinarians

with Professors Bob Baker and George Wellington (Veterinarian graduates were often drafted to serve as food inspectors in the military.) He published extensively in the fields of dairy and food bacteriology, farm sanitation, milk processing, dairy engineering, and bacteriological control in large quantity cooking and cooling. During the period 1954 to 1965, he also served as Department Extension Leader, managing the department's outreach activities.

Professor White was active in the American Dairy Science Association, The New York State Association of Milk and Food International Association of Milk, Food, and Environmental Sanitarians and the Institute of Food Technologists. He was a past president of NYS Association for Food Protection and the recipient of the Emmitt R. Gauhn Award, the association's highest honor. He was also a representative to the 3A Sanitary Standards Committee of the US Public Health Service and the National Labeling Committee of the American Dairy Science Association.

After 27 years at the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, Jim joined the Hotel School as a full professor with tenure. There he taught Food Safety and Sanitation. The sanitation course he presented was more science based than previously presented. It was a required three credit course for all students, consisting of two lectures and a two-hour lab each week. In addition to basic microbiology, each student was required to complete a special project. There were some strange and revealing results, proving that toilet seats were often cleaner than drinking fountains and that Jalapeno peppers did not kill bacteria! *"Some students complained about the difficulty of the course, but most enjoyed the subject,"* according to co-instructor Bonnie Richmond.

During his time at the Hotel School, he also served as assistant dean for Academics. Emeritus Dean John Clark remembers Professor White as a caring and supportive colleague. *"Jim showed wonderful capabilities in dealing with the needs of both graduates and undergraduate students, as well as faculty, staff and alumni. All felt he had their best interests at heart and that his advice and counsel were excellent."*

His tenure in both colleges afforded an opportunity for several academically related sabbaticals. The first, in 1955, was to Colorado with the Denver Department of Health, where his mission was to evaluate the quality of milk and make recommendations to improve the flavor and shelf-life of the milk supply. That led to his next sabbatical in 1962 to Minneapolis, Minnesota where he was a visiting professor of Public Health, studying the costs of inspecting dairy farms and milk processing facilities. He also served as a delegate to the International Dairy Conference, held in Munich, Germany during the summer of 1966.

His final dairy related leave came in 1969-70, when he went to New Zealand at the request of their Department of Agriculture. He made an extensive survey of the New Zealand industry, which resulted in many changes and improvements to their milk collection system.

1979 was the year of his sabbatical from the Hotel School. The Brazilian Government invited him to help start a school for hoteliers in Sao Paulo. He provided the curriculum, and locals with a better grasp of Portuguese were hired to carry out the program. His last overseas mission came after recently retired Dean Beck asked him to come to Paris, France to help start a hotel school there. Jim stayed three months and returned to Ithaca to start a new phase of his life.

Upon full retirement, Jim continued his active career, working in the area of climate change and acid rain, organizing the programs and editing and publishing 16 conference proceedings on the subject. Much of his international travel was dedicated to attending and presenting at meetings all over the world. He also had time to share his leadership skills with a variety of organizations. He served as chair of the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council, founding chair of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, scientific advisor and director of the Center for Environmental Information in Rochester, New York and founding president of the Mariposa DR Foundation in the Dominican Republic. He also found time to be commodore of the Ithaca Yacht Club! During his retirement, he spent his winters in Fort Myers, Florida, where he was an avid tennis player, playing his last game at age 99.

In 2016, on the occasion of his 100th birthday, he was honored with a celebration at the Ithaca Yacht Club attended by over 100 family, friends and colleagues from around the United States and beyond. After the ceremony, he drove to Florida for the winter.

He was especially proud of the fact that he shook the hand of 11 of the 14 Cornell presidents (!) - beginning with President Livingston Farrand and ending with current President Martha Pollack.

His final year (2018) was just as active as any of his most productive in the past. From his winter home in Fort Myers, he made a visit to Cuba via Key West and the Truman White House, returning to Cayuga Lake in April. His last International trip was to a climate meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, he had a fall at the ferry station on the way to Prince Edward Island, which led to eight days in the hospital with a mild head injury, which then turned into pneumonia. After improvement, he was able to return to Ithaca. Full recovery was not to be, and Jim died on October 2nd at his beloved lake front home.

A “Celebration of Life” was held at the Ithaca Yacht Club on June 9, 2019. Four generations of the White / Babcock family attended, along with friends, neighbors and colleagues to share in a life well lived!

Jim was married on September 7, 1941 to Ruth Babcock White (died in 1998). They had three children, James C. White, Jr. (Sonya), Deborah (Ray) Pavelka (died in 2010) and Waldo (Loretta) White. He is also survived by his loving grandchildren: Betsy (James) Hanks, Victoria (Wilson) Spears, James C. White III, Amy Pavelka and Ashley White (Chris) Georgakis, in addition to the much-loved great grandchildren Jacob, Katherine, Hadley, Cora and Jack.

Written by David K. Bandler; with assistance from Robert Gravani and Elizabeth Thorndike