

# Eugene F. Bradford

*March 5, 1889 — February 21, 1972*

Eugene F. Bradford, registrar emeritus, died in Ithaca on February 21, 1972, forty-four years after he joined the University Faculty. He is survived by Marjorie Campbell Bradford, his wife, and their son, Edwin Campbell Bradford.

A lineal descendant of William Bradford, the founder of Plymouth Plantation and longtime governor of the colony, Gene Bradford was born on March 5, 1889, in Bangor, Maine. He carried throughout his life the imprint of New England north of Boston — its traditional conscience and its code, felicitously blended with a dry and discriminating humor.

His scholarly mind and promise were abundantly evident during his under-graduate years at Bowdoin College, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Upon his graduation in 1912, Bowdoin awarded him the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Fellowship in support of his advanced studies at Harvard. There he became pupil and disciple of George Lyman Kittredge. The bond remained a strong one until Kittredge's death in 1941, and the imprint of Kittredge and his ideals of scholarship — like the imprint of northern New England — was eloquently reflected in the exemplary standards and style that marked the career of Gene Bradford.

He earned the degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Philology from Harvard and was a member of the Department of English at Syracuse University. His professional career was interrupted when America entered the First World War. Gene Bradford served as first lieutenant with the 308th Infantry in the Oise-Aisne and the Meuse-Argonne campaigns, was wounded in action, and in later years wore his veteran's emblem as conscientiously as he wore his Phi Beta Kappa key. After study at Oxford for a year, he returned to Syracuse and in 1926 took charge of the admissions program there.

President Livingston Farrand invited Bradford to Cornell two years later as the University's first director of admissions, and in 1931 he became registrar as well as director of admissions, serving in both capacities until after the Second World War.

His years at Cornell revealed him as a meticulous administrator, whose orderly mind and dispassionate approach to the complexities of his assignment qualified him well for the duties which he had assumed. But there were other aspects of his nature which came to light soon after he reached the campus. He was essentially an academic man

by temperament and by inclination, and his heart never really left the classroom and the library after he went into administrative work. Moreover, he was an academic man of unusually independent spirit and point of view, well adapted to the rigorous professional climate of a Faculty celebrated for having a redoubtable and even fierce independence of its own.

It was in character for a man such as Gene Bradford to insist upon teaching, no matter what else he might be doing, and he taught until the burgeoning pressures of the late 1930s and the early '40s made him give up his thrice-weekly pilgrimages to Goldwin Smith. It was also in character for his active interest in research to persist. One of his abiding satisfactions was the monthly meeting of The Circle, an informal group which gathered to hear an original paper read by Howard Adelman, Carl Stephenson, Leonard A. Maynard, Gene Bradford himself, or one of the other members — and submitting the author to an uninhibited grilling afterward.

At his desk in Morrill Hall, near a window which looked out across the valley towards West Hill, Gene Bradford seemed to personify the integrity and the underlying warmth of the institution. Even his manner and his appearance were congenial to his role. Well remembered are the unobtrusive and relaxed dignity of speech and bearing, the gray suit (usually with vest, except in hot weather) that was part of his careful grooming, the level gaze which — under provocation — could turn frosty behind the rimless glasses, the generous growth of eyebrow, the strong line of chin and jawbone. And with it all, a small forelock that refused to stay in place during the course of a hard day's work and helped relieve any impression of austerity.

He was primarily a quiet force in University affairs, and (there is really no other way to express the almost esoteric quality) he commanded respect. His style in speaking and writing was sparse and to the point. He might encounter debate over a substantive issue on the infrequent occasions when he addressed a meeting of the University Faculty, but he invariably received a measure of attention over and beyond the demands of parliamentary courtesy. Along with George Holland Sabine, Cornelius Betten, A. W. Gibson, and others, he was a member of the Faculty who never had to explain what he meant after he finished talking.

The recognition which Gene Bradford was accorded by his campus associates was also manifest in the professional circles in which he moved. He was elected vice-chairman of the Executive Committee of the College Entrance Examination Board, and for many years he played an important part in the affairs of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, its Commission on Higher Education, and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. He was a member of the Modern Language Association, the American Association of University Professors, and his social fraternity was Delta Kappa Epsilon.

A strong-minded as well as a high-minded man, Gene Bradford on occasion found himself engaged in differences of opinion with another strong-minded and high-minded man, President Edmund Ezra Day, who succeeded Livingston Farrand in 1937. The differences were a bit sharp at times, but over the years they were of small consequence on a campus where high-minded men often found themselves ranged against colleagues who thought otherwise, without lasting impairment of professional regard or personal esteem on either hand.

The end of the Second World War and the onrush of applications for admission brought to the fore irrepressible questions of policy and procedure in handling the awesome work load. The booming expansion of the administrative complex, an inevitable result of the booming expansion of everything else, symbolized the rapid and enforced changes that the postwar years brought upon the University. In 1946 the outward and visible signs of the new era included the recently completed administration building (later to be named for Edmund Ezra Day), the sprawling and allegedly temporary quarters for veterans beyond Judd Falls Road, and the mushrooming Faculty housing development on the slope of East Hill. In that year the Office of Admissions was established as a separate organization under Director Herbert H. Williams. Gene Bradford continued to serve as registrar until his retirement in 1957 and in the process experienced one of the most productive phases of his service to Cornell.

In his time as director of admissions and as registrar, he had a critical and continuing part in the University's effort to maintain the quality of its student body and its standards in the wake of the stock market crash of 1929, the hard years of the Great Depression, recovery, and a devastating war and its aftermath. He was witness to the establishment of the School of Nutrition in 1939, the School of Industrial and Labor Relations in 1945, and the School of Business and Public Administration in 1946. In connection with each of these benchmarks along the way of Cornell's academic growth and development, Gene Bradford played a greater or lesser role as circumstance and his responsibilities directed. All in all, his contribution to the increasing strength of the University was invaluable and, in many respects, unique.

He was a conservative in the finest sense of the term, yet without trace of the stark rigidity too often mistaken for good New England conscience. His convictions with respect to the mission of the University were rooted in a sophisticated understanding of the genius or spirit of the place, and his concept of the University interest, which he had served with such singleness of purpose, was as timeless as that view across the valley towards West Hill.

*Blanchard L. Rideout, Harry Caplan, Howard B. Adelman, Edward K. Graham, Walter A. Snickenberger*