

Edmund Louis Worthen

October 5, 1882 — 1965

Edmund L. Worthen was born October 5, 1882, on a farm near Warsaw, Illinois. His grade-school education took place in a one-room country school near by. High school facilities were less convenient and required daily travel of about nine miles on foot or horseback.

At the University of Illinois, Mr. Worthen came under the inspiration of one of the great soil scientists of the time, Dr. Cyril G. Hopkins, whom he was to frequently quote in later years. The B.S. degree was granted in 1904. This was followed by work in the Illinois soil survey. In 1905 he came to Cornell for a year of graduate study. From that time he was successively employed by the United States Department of Agriculture, 1906-09; North Carolina State University, 1909-12; and Pennsylvania State University, 1912-19. Cornell granted him the M.S. in 1908.

In 1919 he returned to Cornell as Professor of Soil Technology and project leader of agronomy extension. Prospects for his success were in no [way] impaired when outstanding individuals at other institutions sought to join his staff and become a part of “the Cornell Tradition.” Among those employed over nearly three decades were one or two rugged individualists who tested Professor Worthen’s administrative skills but never exhausted his infinite patience.

Being somewhat of a perfectionist, Professor Worthen wrote extension project statements in precise language which cautiously delimited even the subprojects. Because of this, his extension program was not noted for flexibility, but no one denied that it was successful. For over a quarter of a century he and his extension associates were a link between the College of Agriculture and the farm population. They evaluated, sometimes researched, and of course disseminated information on crop and soil management, this in the interest of a better livelihood for the farmers of the State.

At the expense of field activities Professor Worthen shouldered more than one man’s quota of farmer correspondence. He could pack more sound practical advice into a one-page letter than any associate.

He had a good radio voice and always did his share of radio programs.

One outstanding feature of the annual Farm and Home Week for more than a decade was the Worthen fertilizer forum. In this he presented timely information concerning “best buys” in commercial fertilizers and forthrightly answered farmers’ questions.

He taught an effective undergraduate course on fertilizers and fertilization until extension activities demanded his full time. Another teaching enterprise was an extension-sponsored correspondence course which was broad enough to include most aspects of soil management. The popularity of this venture ran high as long as he corrected all of the papers.

Professor Worthen wrote a successful vocational-agriculture textbook *Farm Soils* which went through five editions (1927, 1935, 1941, 1948, and 1956). The latter revision brought into authorship Dr. S. R. Aldrich. He was also the author of numerous bulletins and leaflets and hundreds of special articles for farm bureau monthly publications.

He coordinated the efforts of at least six colleagues who carried the responsibility for crop and soil investigations on outlying experimental fields at Alfred, Churchville, and Virgil.

Undoubtedly E. L. Worthen's greatest contribution to New York agriculture was in making possible access to open formula and high analysis fertilizers before the latter became widely accepted. In retrospect this appears as a major step from an unenlightened and empirical fertilizer use to more rational and profitable choice and application of plant nutrients. When the fertilizer industry resisted his pioneering efforts, he wisely persuaded the G.L.F. Exchange (now Agway) to take action. This was the beginning of a relationship between College and Cooperative which was destined to greatly benefit the farm population.

He was a fellow of the American Society of Agronomy, a member of the American Society for the Advancement of Science, Sigma Xi, Epsilon Sigma Phi, Gamma Sigma Delta, and Alpha Zeta.

In 1907 Professor Worthen married Xenia Woolman, who died in 1948. Of their three children, Albert and Rachel Daura (Mrs. Richard Sidenberg) survive, with five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Elizabeth Jane had died in 1948.

Professor Worthen retired with the rank of Emeritus Professor in 1948; in 1952 he married Mrs. Clarence Doyle, who survives him.

The persisting image of Professor Worthen in the minds of his host of friends is that of a charming, genial gentleman who contributed much to life and enjoyed it to the fullest.

Stanley W. Warren, Earl L. Stone, Herbert B. Hartwig