

Dwight Sanderson

September 25, 1878 — September 27, 1944

Dwight Sanderson, Professor of Rural Sociology Emeritus, passed away at his home, Elmcote, in Ithaca, N. Y. on September 27, 1944.

He retired from active service in the University as professor and head of the department on October 15, 1943, after 25 years of service. He had been the head of this department from its inception and was chiefly responsible for its growth and development.

Dr. Sanderson came to Cornell in 1918 to become its first active professor of rural sociology. He was not unfamiliar with the University. A year after receiving his Bachelor of Science degree at Michigan Agricultural College in 1897, he became a student here and received his second degree of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, specializing in entomology, in 1898.

From 1898 to 1917, he served in several positions in the field of entomology in Maryland, Delaware, Texas, New Hampshire, and West Virginia. In 1904 he became professor of zoology and state entomologist at New Hampshire State College. That he was a successful teacher, research worker, and administrator in this field is evidenced by the responsible positions which he held and the long list of entomological writings which he produced. These included four books and more than 50 articles on entomological problems. During these years, he served as president of the Association of Economic Entomologists.

In 1907 Dr. Sanderson began a period of service as an agricultural college administrator, first as director of the Agricultural Experiment Station at New Hampshire. In 1910 he went to West Virginia as dean of the college of agriculture, a position which he held until 1915. In this period he became interested in the study of the human problems of rural life, and in 1917 he entered the University of Chicago to take graduate work in sociology. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in sociology at Chicago University in 1921 and immediately returned to Cornell.

The beginnings of the department of rural sociology at Cornell were humble. It was a new and uncharted field of work. For several years, Professor Sanderson and one other colleague did all the teaching and research work. Soon, he was able to add an extension worker, then an additional teacher and research colleague. In those early days he began research projects in the delineation of the rural community, and it was in this area that he made his most important contribution to rural sociology.

First there was produced by him and his graduate students, a series of monographs on the rural community. About the same time a series of his editorial writings were combined and published as ‘The Farmer and His Community.’ He next wrote a volume, “The Rural Community,” this was followed by a volume on “Rural Community Organization.” Later he produced “Rural Sociology and Rural Social Organization,” a text book in rural sociology.

Dr. Sanderson was active in the American Country Life Association of which he was one of the founders and the first secretary, and later its president. He was also a member of the American Sociological Society, and of the Rural Sociological Society and served as president in both organizations. In addition to holding membership in the sociological and rural life organizations, Dr. Sanderson was a member of Sigma Xi, and Phi Kappa Phi and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

That the department which he directed became recognized as a leading one in the United States is evidenced by the large number of graduate students who come to Cornell to study in this field. In the last quarter century, 40 students have taken the doctor’s degree in rural sociology, in addition to the large number who have received the master’s degree. Practically all of these men now hold responsible positions in the field of rural sociology in colleges of agriculture, experiment stations, and in the United States Department of Agriculture, as well as in several foreign countries.

Dr. Sanderson was a continuous writer in the field of general and rural sociology. In addition to five books, he published 17 research bulletins, most of them from the Experiment Station at Cornell, 48 articles in scientific journals and magazines, and a very extensive list of reports, proceedings, and book reviews.

It is rare that one man attains eminence during a life-time in two distinct fields, but this is true of Dwight Sanderson.

Besides achieving eminence in his scientific work, Dr. Sanderson was a public spirited citizen, taking part constantly in civic affairs. During his residence in Ithaca he served as a Director of the Community Chest, the Council of Social Agencies, the Social Service League, the Red Cross, and the Family Society.

His generous personality endeared him to a wide circle of colleagues and friends.