

Herrell Franklin DeGraff

August 12, 1908 — January 4, 1986

Herrell DeGraff, professor emeritus, died at his home, 12 Burns Road, Brooktondale, New York. Much of his life was spent as a participant and leader in the Cornell community. He was born and reared in the town of Murray, Orleans County, New York. After high school he operated a farm on a share basis, worked as an equipment salesman and office manager, and sold investment securities. At the age of twenty-five, with a wife and young daughter, he enrolled as a freshman in the College of Agriculture, working nights at a commercial dairy farm. He completed the B.S. degree with an outstanding academic record in 1937. He completed his M.S. degree the following year and the Ph.D. degree in 1941, when he was appointed to the Cornell faculty as an assistant professor. He spent the first year of his tenure in postdoctoral study at the University of Chicago to develop a new course in agricultural geography. He was promoted to associate professor in 1942 and to full professor in 1947.

For ten years his course in agricultural geography provided incoming freshmen with a broad, worldwide perspective of agriculture. He was a dynamic teacher and tireless leader in the agricultural community, highly sought after as a speaker at both state and national meetings. He was the second person to be voted the Professor of Merit Award by the college seniors and for several years was the faculty representative on the Cornell Board of Trustees. Expanding his interests to include international agriculture after World War II, he served as a Rockefeller Foundation fellow in Mexico and as a consultant to the Rockefeller Foundation Development Program in Mexico and Colombia. His friends remember well during the late 1940s that he would habitually return to his office late at night, following some speaking engagement “out in the state,” to prepare for the next day’s lecture. Though he was involved in many peripheral activities, it was in the classroom where his skills reached their zenith. His classes were always filled to capacity, and although his subject matter was aimed at the freshman and sophomore level, it was a rare graduate student that did not sit in on his lectures.

In 1951 he was chosen to be the first holder of the H. E. Babcock Memorial Professorship in the Graduate School of Nutrition, an endowed chair. His appointment was based on his original work in food economics. He held that position until 1962, when he became president of the American Meat Institute in Chicago, a position from which he retired in 1973. During much of that period he continued to serve Cornell as chairman of the College of Agriculture’s Advisory Council. On his frequent return trips to Ithaca he spoke as a guest lecturer in various

courses dealing with the food economy. On retirement from the American Meat Institute Professor DeGraff returned to Ithaca, where he resumed many of the community interests he had left in 1962.

For several years he served as a senior lecturer in marketing and food economics courses, and he renewed his involvement with the Tompkins County Hospital Board of Managers. He served as president of the hospital board during the years when it made the decisions to build a new building and to become a nonprofit public corporation. For many years before leaving Ithaca in 1962 he had also served on the hospital board of managers. Because of his long and continued interest in Cornell, and because of his outstanding achievements as a teacher of many years, the faculty voted him professor emeritus. Indeed, few faculty members over the years have served Cornell so faithfully and so well.

Professor DeGraff's wife, Gladys Pool DeGraff, died in 1977. They are survived by a daughter, Sara K. DeGraff, and a son, Peter H. DeGraff.

Wendell G. Earle, Robert S. Smith, Bernard E. Stanton, Max E. Brunk