

Harry Oliver Buckman

July 4, 1883 — December 7, 1964

Harry Buckman was born on a farm at West Liberty, Iowa, where he very early gained the farmers' viewpoint which helped make him effective in later work on soil surveys, soil and crop management surveys, in preparing the resulting publications, and in the classroom. His formal education began in a one-room country school and terminated with postdoctoral studies in geology and climatology at Harvard University. Mr. Buckman earned a Bachelor of Science degree at Iowa State University (Ames) in 1906, and a Master of Science degree at the same institution in 1908. The Ph.D. in Soil Science was awarded him by Cornell University in 1912. At that time he was appointed a Cornell Assistant Professor of Soil Technology. He was awarded a full professorship five years later.

Dr. Buckman was an avid reader of English and American literature, history, geology, and theology. He could be depended upon to contribute something worthwhile to conversations on many topics. His knowledge of geology made him a most delightful traveling companion for he could improve most anyone's understanding of land forms in almost any area of New York State.

Professor Buckman's first part-time professional employment was as assistant chemist in the Iowa Experiment Station in 1906 and 1907. His first full-time appointment was as assistant agronomist in the Montana Agricultural Experiment Station in 1908. In 1910, because of his interest in students and in pedagogical mechanics, he was chosen to serve as teaching assistant in the elementary course in soil science at Cornell. Beginning in 1912 he was given full responsibility for that course which was to become the major activity of his professional career.

He taught with outstanding success a total of over 10,000 students in five separate courses. Ever the perfectionist, he devoted evenings when others were relaxing, to further refining the technical and communicational details of his classroom presentations. Noteworthy features of his remarkable lectures were the unique lead-off one or two-minute review of the highlights of his previous lecture leading into the current one; his use of chalk which reminded one of a penmanship copybook; his practiced blackboard sketches; his clear, concise, and yet uncompromising explanations of technical subject matter; his very helpful blackboard outlines; and his liberal use of slides with a difficult carbon-arc projector in a period before such use became widespread.

How well he succeeded in the classroom is evidenced by the fact that, although this was the beginning course in soil science for undergraduates, some semesters there were as many as a dozen graduate students enrolled to observe this master teacher. Staff members from all parts of the campus sought the privilege of editing his lectures.

Surely no one can estimate how much he contributed by example and inspiration to the improvement of college teaching all over the world.

Dr. Buckman's unselfish concern for students did not stop at the classroom door. He was a most effective student adviser. Since Professor and Mrs. Buckman had no children, it seemed to follow that he took a paternal interest in his advisees who brought to him not only academic, but all kinds of problems. He was ever in demand as a speaker at student functions. Especially well deserved was the student Professor of Merit award conferred upon him in 1948-49.

Most outstanding of his writings were textbooks, the first of which was *Soils, Their Properties and Management* published in 1915. He was coauthor with Lyon and Fippin. In 1922 a new book, *The Nature and Properties of Soils*, was written by Lyon and Buckman. A second edition appeared in 1929 and a third in 1937. Most of the latter and all of the 1943 revision were written by Dr. Buckman. The fifth edition in 1952 brought into the authorship Dr. N. C. Brady, who also wrote all of the 1960 edition. This book is read by agriculturalists all over the world and widely used for instruction in universities throughout the United States and Canada. It has been translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese.

Professor Buckman was affiliated with various professional and honorary organizations, among which are the American Society of Agronomy, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the International Soil Science Society, Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Phi, Alpha Zeta, and Gamma Alpha.

As a faculty member, Dr. Buckman cheerfully shouldered the duties of numerous committees, always contributing with characteristic thoroughness and sound judgment. During those periods when he was called upon to serve as acting head of the Department of Agronomy, he proved to be a good administrator. Especially popular was his willingness to "hear each staff member to the end" with understanding and patience.

Probably unequaled was his record of never missing a lecture, recitation, or laboratory session during his entire thirty-nine years of teaching. How much sheer courage and sense of duty this required was probably understood only by his loyal and devoted wife, Rita Shannon Buckman. It seems ironic that within four months after the date of his retirement in 1949, Professor Emeritus Buckman came under the close care of his physician, so to remain during all of the last fifteen years of his life.

Nyle C. Brady, Richard Bradfield, Herbert B. Hartwig