

Melvin G. deChazeau

March 20, 1900 — November 28, 1985

Without the efforts of Melvin G. deChazeau, one of the small group of academic entrepreneurs who guided the then Graduate School of Business and Public Administration in its early years, it is unlikely that there would be a Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell today. Known affectionately as “the Silver Fox” by three decades of students, Mel was an academic in all the best senses of the word and a tower of strength to the new institution. As the “first among equals,” he provided the continuity and institutional energy that sustained the school through its early, lean years.

Together with such colleagues as Paul O’Leary and John Hutchins, in economics; Arthur Nilsson, in finance; David Thomas, in accounting; Frank Gilmore, in business policy; and Edward Litchfield, Miller Hillhouse, and Paul VanRiper, all in public administration, Mel established the atmosphere of excellence in research and teaching that distinguished the school from the outset. By the quality of his mind and the force of his personality Mel was a true leader of the school. He assumed formal leadership as acting dean when Paul O’Leary’s term ended. Afterwards he was the perennial chairman of the school’s policy committee.

Mel and those of his colleagues who constituted the senior faculty of the school had an unusual talent. They facilitated growth and change in the school with statesmanlike attitudes: younger colleagues trained in different, more-quantitative ways were welcomed as team teachers in the basic courses in the curriculum “because that made the courses better courses.” The senior faculty members gave of themselves unselfishly to the school. In many ways Mel gave of himself the most. He gave to his students and to the school countless hours that he could have used to enhance further his national reputation. Nonetheless, through his teaching and research Melvin deChazeau, along with Joel Dean, was recognized as a founder of the newly emerging field of managerial economics. The less-talented of the students in his managerial economics class sometimes facetiously referred to the course as “the mystery hour.” At the same time, students and alumni alike appreciated the course as one of the most important in providing the foundation for analytic thinking by managers.

For more than a decade Mel represented the university at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), then headed by his longtime friend and Harvard classmate Arthur Burns. At NBER the two men did much of the fundamental work on business cycles.

Mel recognized that few things in real-world economics are simple. He had the ability first to understand problems

in their complexity and then to reach a reasoned judgment about their true significance, whether within the firm or at a public policy level. These qualities came through in his monumental works on the steel industry (with Dougherty and Stratton) and on the petroleum industry (with Alfred Kahn). The latter, *Integration and Competition in the Petroleum Industry*, was recognized at the time of its publication as the definitive work on the structure and performance of that industry and earned a full, highly favorable review article in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Mel treated us, his junior colleagues, with great courtesy as equals and encouraged us to speak our minds on all matters academic. It didn't take us long, however, to recognize the gap between his intellect and our own.

With Mel as a friend, we had a friend for life. The friendship extended deeply into our families and his. Mel had great personal grace but could appear brusque and imperious at times. When that did occur, Eunice was always there with sweetness, intelligence, and deep humanity, providing the leavening that permitted Mel's inner warmth to re-emerge. We can still recall his distinctive laughter, which so often echoed through McGraw and Malott halls and in our homes and his home on the Knoll.

Melvin deChazeau was born in 1900 in Olympia, Washington. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Washington and his Ph.D. degree in 1930 from Harvard University. He justly took pride in the fact that he, as a westerner from the University of Washington, had graduated first in his doctoral class at Harvard—a class that included Arthur Burns and a number of other distinguished economists. Mel served his country during World War II as a senior official of the War Production Board. Later he served as a senior economist and as liaison between the Department of Commerce and the President's Council of Economic Advisors. Before coming to Cornell, he taught at the University of Virginia and the University of Chicago. He is survived by his wife, Eunice; his daughter, Marian Holmes; his son-in-law, David Holmes; and his grandchildren, Melvin, Rebecca, Jessica, and Robert Holmes.

We remember Mel with deep respect and great affection. The Johnson School—and the field of management education in general—owes a great debt to him and to his fellow pioneers.

Harold Bierman, Edward Flash, Seymour Smidt, Alan McAdams