

Robert P. Story

April 8, 1919 — March 12, 2002

Robert P. Story, 82 when he died at home, was born in Middletown Springs, Vermont. The son of Edgar Prescott Story and Harriet Dewey Prindle, he grew up on a small Vermont dairy farm. After graduating from Gloucester (MA) High School in 1936, he attended the Vermont State School of Agriculture and went on to the University of Vermont, graduating in 1943.

Dr. Story enlisted in the U.S. Army in May 1943 and served as First Lieutenant in the 8th Regiment of the 4th Division, which landed on Utah Beach on June 11, 1944, as part of the D-Day Invasion. He commanded a mortar platoon, serving as a forward observer, and was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

After discharge, he resumed his education, earning a Master's degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Vermont, where he became an Instructor in Farm Management and Farm Finance. In 1948, he began doctoral studies at Cornell University, earning a Ph.D. degree in 1952. There he spent the next 28 years, serving as Assistant Professor (1952-55), Associate Professor (1955-60) and Professor (1960-79) of Marketing in the Department of Agricultural Economics. He was named Professor Emeritus in 1980.

Dr. Story was the second faculty member to specialize in the department's 80-year commitment to programs in the area of dairy markets and policy, a specialization for which Cornell has an international reputation. He was especially appreciated and remembered for his work with New York and Northeastern milk marketing cooperatives. A trusted analyst and adviser, his advice was sought for business and policy decisions. A hallmark of his career was the respect he earned by being extremely knowledgeable about the industry and its complex regulatory policies and the respect he demanded in keeping academic objectivity about the merits of policy choices.

Highlights of his research included several projects on the consolidation of Federal Milk Marketing Orders in the Northeast and coordination of milk assembly and other marketing services. His testimony at regulatory hearings at the State and Federal level was routinely sought and always appreciated. His intimate knowledge of marketing institutions and milk pricing and keen analytical insights gained him recognition in identifying current and future problems and solutions. He was routinely called upon to collect, analyze and present data on milk pricing programs. He achieved a unique position of respect, trust, and confidence that permitted him to work effectively across groups and with regulators as well as those regulated.

He served on numerous industry and public committees at state, regional and national levels, including the hallmark Rockefeller Commission in the 1960s. However, he was noted for shunning the limelight and preferred to work “behind the scenes” in a way that facilitated his ability to work with a broad group of players.

Although spending much of his time working with industry and governmental leaders, Dr. Story never missed an opportunity to meet with producers, listen to their concerns and provide or seek answers to their questions. Early in his career he worked closely with Cornell Cooperative Extension agents to establish milk marketing study groups and participated in and helped develop educational meetings for producers and cooperatives. Shortly before his retirement, the New York State Association of County Agents recognized him for his long-standing and excellent support of extension programs.

Dr. Story brought the same intensity and commitment to his teaching. He viewed education about the industry he loved, the subjects of whom he was a master, and the people he served as a life-long learning commitment, starting with the future agricultural leaders who were his students. Many in the industry regarded him as a mentor, and indeed a couple of generations of young faculty viewed him as such also. A quiet man, he was noted not for his flashy style but rather for his deep understanding of his subject, commitment to rigorous analysis, unmistakable commitment to his students, and unflagging high standards. Many regarded him as the quintessential Vermonter, unflinching in his honesty, completely reliable, possessed of uncommon common sense, and stoic to a fault.

Never one to let much grass grow under his feet, he either plowed it up in his 3-acre garden or wore it out while he and his wife, Ruth, raised their six children. He was an avid golfer a legendary fisherman, and tireless sports fan.

Robert is survived by his wife of 58 years, Ruth Arms Miller; his six children: Susan Porter (Roy), of Farmington, Connecticut; Sara Geld (Kenneth), of Sao Paulo, Brazil; Christine Hogan (Patrick), of LaGrange Park, Illinois; Prescott (Kathleen), of Weston, Connecticut; Robert, Jr. (Carol), of Ashland, Massachusetts; and David (Elizabeth), of Northbrook, Illinois; and fourteen grandchildren. A brother Edgar Prescott Story (Betty), of Gainesville, Virginia, and his family also survive him.

Richard Aplin, Walter Wasserman, Andrew Novakovic