

Robert L. Patton

October 31, 1913 — June 25, 2008

Robert L. Patton, 94, formerly of Ithaca, died on June 25, 2008 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

He was born in Livingston, Montana, to the late Alva L. and Annie L. Patton. He received a B.S. degree from Montana State College, Bozeman and a Ph.D. degree from the University of California, Berkeley. He married Mary Louise Trask (1913-2000) on September 6, 1938 in Deer Lodge, Montana.

In 1939, he joined the faculty at Cornell. His field was Insect Physiology, to which he contributed research, a textbook and mentored 22 graduate students, several of whom went on to become distinguished contributors as well. He was a pioneer in the field of electrophysiology as applied to insects, and in the early 1950s, he was able to monitor activity of the nervous system of an insect using electro-mechanical equipment of his own design. This breakthrough was reported in Newsweek Magazine. In 1978, he was named a Professor Emeritus, and in 2002, he was honored by the creation of a permanent visiting lectureship in his name.

He was skilled in ultra-micro chemistry, and during World War II, he was a member of the team that developed an extensible method for chemically isolating Plutonium 239. In 1948, President Truman cited him for this contribution to the war effort.

He was very active in scouting, serving as a troop leader and in other roles for which the Silver Beaver Award recognized him in 1981. He enjoyed playing the clarinet and was an accomplished woodworker.

He is survived by his son, James L. Patton (Carol) of Dexter, Michigan; his nephew, Beyer R. Patton of Golden, Colorado; his granddaughters, Elisabeth A. Freeland of Portland, Oregon, Dr. Susana R. Patton of Dexter, Michigan, and Catherine L. Patton of Madison, Wisconsin; as well as three great-granddaughters. His parents, his wife, his brother, Alva R., his son, Robert W., and granddaughter Alice H., preceded him in death.

A family memorial service was held in Michigan. Burial was at East Lawn Cemetery, Ithaca.

Jeffrey G. Scott, Chairperson; Angela Douglas, Cole Gilbert, James L. Patton