

Robert Glen Mower

September 27, 1928 — December 27, 2005

Professor Emeritus Robert (Bob) Mower, age 77, passed away December 27, 2005, at the Cayuga Medical Center at Ithaca of pneumonia following surgery to repair a broken hip suffered in a fall earlier in the month. Bob was born September 27, 1928 in Gasport, New York. His family lived in Johnson's Creek, New York. He attended elementary, junior high and high school at Barker Central School in Barker, New York. Time after school and during summer recesses were spent working at a neighbor's fruit and dairy farm that enhanced his interest in agriculture. At an early age, he demonstrated an aptitude for drawing and painting. In high school, he took an intensive correspondence drawing course and art classes. Teachers and school administrators noted his artistic abilities, thus, he was invited to paint murals on selected walls at Barker Central School that he accepted and completed. These paintings stood the test of time. They were just recently destroyed as the result of necessary school remodeling. Later in life, Bob's enthusiasm for drawing helped him in a very major way as a teacher of plant materials at Cornell University.

After graduation, Bob enlisted in the United States Navy in July 1948. His four-year tour of duty included the Korean War. Following his honorable discharge from the U.S. Navy, he enrolled at Paul Smiths College in September 1952. The following fall, Bob transferred to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University to study horticulture in the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture. After graduation, he was accepted into the Graduate School at Cornell. He was appointed as a turfgrass research graduate assistant under the direction of Dr. John Cornman in the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture. After receiving his M.S. degree in June 1959, he shifted to the Department of Plant Pathology where, under the direction of Dr. Roy Millar, he worked on the histology of selected turfgrass diseases during the infection process. The requirements for the Ph.D. degree were completed in 1961 after which he was hired as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture. During the years that followed, Bob conducted research and Cooperative Extension programs but he truly distinguished himself as an outstanding teacher of landscape plant materials. His courses in woody, herbaceous and interior plant identification and use were outstanding in their content, detail (his drawings of plant identification clues were outstanding) and rigor. Students who took these courses certainly learned a great deal about plants. But they also developed a respect and adoration of the person in charge—Professor Robert G. Mower. Bob received awards for his outstanding teaching, including The Professor of Merit Award, New York State College of Agriculture, and the Louis and Edith Edgerton Career Teaching Award.

also of the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. But more importantly to him was the love and respect that students demonstrated in their own way on his behalf. Certificates and plaques of appreciation were commonly given to him by students at the conclusion of each semester because of his excellent teaching.

His teaching effort included courses in woody, herbaceous and interior plant identification and use. He taught two 3- to 4-hour courses each semester. In addition, he offered an independent study course each term. He was a master at organizing such courses for large numbers of students. His Wednesday night independent study course covered various topics over the years such as in-depth examinations of specific plant groups, designing perennial gardens and construction of outdoor garden furniture. In the spring semester, he offered an additional Saturday morning course (late March to early May) that focused on hands-on garden maintenance practices as well as the transplanting of thousands of annual transplants in on-campus greenhouse facilities. These seedlings were used in many of the gardens on campus each year including the Lua Minns Garden. Few courses challenged Bob's organizational skills as these Saturday morning classes did because of the numbers of students who needed to be deployed at the various gardens and greenhouse facilities on campus but he always managed to mastermind the location assignments in an efficient manner. Surprisingly, attendance at this Saturday morning class was excellent. Because these special topics courses were offered at times when few others were, students including many from colleges other than the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences heavily subscribed them.

Bob also devoted himself, in association with the University Grounds Department and scores of students, to the development and/or maintenance of several gardens on campus including the Lua Minns Memorial Garden, the Willard Straight Rock Garden and the A.D. White Museum Garden that are collectively enjoyed by thousands of individuals each year. A plaque acknowledging his contributions to the Willard Straight Rock Garden and a memorial bench in the A.D. White Museum Garden provide ample evidence of his work.

One cannot conclude this memorial statement without commenting on the controversy that Bob generated in his woody plant classes regarding the worth of the native tree, boxelder (*Acer negundo*). Most professional horticulturists are of the opinion that boxelder is a woody perennial weed having few if any virtues. The flowering of this species offers nothing as far as landscape value nor does it offer any attractive fruit or fall color. Seed production can be significant, but since the seed can germinate on sites that other species find unsatisfactory, it can very easily become a weed management issue. To the contrary, Bob would defend the use of this plant in the landscape for a variety of reasons. How could such a learned individual take such a stand? Was Bob sincere in his defense of boxelder or was his position on this matter simply a ruse? Most believed it was the latter though we will

never be sure. However, it does not really matter. The issue served to enhance student interest in woody plants both in and outside of the classroom and to stimulate student interaction with Bob and between themselves.

Bob retired in 2000. His parents, Fern Burns Mower and Glen Mower, predeceased him. He is survived by his sister, Betty Mower Anderson, Trumbull, Connecticut; and nephews Richard Anderson, Trumbull, Connecticut, Alan (Michele) Anderson, Murrieta, California, and Mark (Elizabeth) Anderson, Union, Maine. A memorial gathering of family, friends, alumni and colleagues was held on the afternoon of June 30, 2006 at the Robert G. Mower Memorial Bench in the A.D. White Museum Garden.

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