

Van Breed Hart

October 5, 1894 — April 30, 1976

The death of Van B. Hart brought to an end a long period of service to agriculture in New York State and the nation. During forty years of this period he was an active member of the staff of the Department of Agricultural Economics, College of Agriculture.

Professor Hart was born and brought up on a crop and dairy farm near McLean in Tompkins County, New York. He attended the New York State College of Agriculture and received the Bachelor of Science degree in 1916. After graduation he served as a commissioned officer and pilot in the United States Naval Dirigible Service during World War I. He entered the Cornell Graduate School in 1920 and served as a graduate student and instructor in farm management. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1923 when he was appointed assistant professor. He was promoted to professor in 1927.

His major responsibilities were in agricultural extension. He had a large part in developing the role of the subject-matter specialist in extension work. This was recognized in 1950, when he received the United States Department of Agriculture Superior Service Award “for exceptional ability and zeal in developing and maintaining a well-balanced farm management program with special foresight in adjusting to changed conditions, and for his pioneering efforts and accomplishment in the field of farm finance.”

When the Federal Farm Credit Administration was organized in the early thirties, he was granted a year’s leave of absence from Cornell to serve as president of the Springfield Production Credit Corporation. In 1946 the Bankers’ School of Agriculture at Cornell was organized with Professor Hart as academic director. These schools are continuing today. The officers and staff of many New York commercial banks are knowledgeable in the field of agriculture. If this is due to one man, Professor Hart must be awarded the distinction.

With changes in income tax laws and regulations, tax management became increasingly important. Professor Hart, recognizing the changes early, played a leading role in tax education for farmers, on both state and national levels. He was a consultant to both the New York State and Federal Internal Revenue Services.

During World War II he served as agricultural advisor in the War Finance Division of the United States Treasury. While on leave from Cornell in this capacity Professor Hart helped organize the farm War Bond Program in the country, and he prepared a considerable portion of the farm War Bond literature used in various bond drives. He

was given the United States Treasury Award and silver medal by Secretary of the Treasury Vinson and a special citation “for distinguished services rendered in behalf of the War Finance Program.”

Among the many publications written by Professor Hart was a 1944 bulletin titled *Suggestions to Persons Who Plan to Farm or to Live in the Country*. The publication stressed the advantages and pitfalls of country life, and its popularity resulted in several reprintings and revisions. Early in its beginning Professor Hart recognized the back-to-the-land movement, a sometimes Utopian idea that is still popular in the minds of many nonfarm people.

Professor Hart was a joint author of the books, *Farm Management Manual*, *Agricultural Credit*, and *Farm Management and Marketing*. The latter was widely used in the forties and fifties in the Northeast as a text in teaching vocational agriculture to high school students. He was also the author of numerous bulletins on farm finance, farm management, farm income taxes, farm accounting, and land use.

Professor Hart was a member of the board of directors of the Tompkins County Trust Company and served two terms as an alderman for the City of Ithaca. Early in 1975, following the death of his wife, the former Helen Berdina Clark whom he married in 1922, he moved to Ithacare, a minimum care facility for the elderly. He became popular with other residents and was elected a member of the resident council. He remained active and rarely missed attending church, the bank board, or other meetings of the many fraternal organizations of which he was a member. On Easter Sunday he enjoyed a family gathering. A few days later he suffered a severe stroke, and death came within a week.

He is immediately survived by a sister, Mrs. George Scofield, a grand-daughter, Donna Hart Staples, and a grandson, Richard Hart.

Lowell C. Cunningham, Robert S. Smith, Clifton W. Loomis