

Reeshon Feuer

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Reeshon Feuer, soil scientist, left his mark on the mantle of the Earth: in selecting a site for the capital city of Brazil; in guiding rice farming in the Philippines; and in directing an enlightened use of the land from end to end of New York State. His boundless enthusiasm for learning and for sharing his knowledge continued to the very end of his life.

A native of New Hampshire, he began his career as scientist by graduating in Agricultural Chemistry from UNH, and he joined the USDA Soil Survey Division that was engaged in mapping the soil boundaries in that state. After an appointment as a faculty member at UNH, he came to Cornell to study for a Doctorate. Upon receiving it, he was appointed an Assistant Professor with principal duties in extension teaching. He was promoted to Professor, served as Departmental Extension Leader in Agronomy, and for four years was Visiting Professor of Soils and Agronomy at the University of the Philippines, as Cornell faculty members assisted in the creation of graduate-level educational programs at Los Banos.

The foregoing chronicle only hints at the qualities that made Reeshon Feuer famous wherever he lived and worked. "I have not known another person with such a thirst for knowledge about all things in the natural environment as Reesh had," wrote his former department chairman. With enormous vitality he read, observed, recorded and organized information, not only in relation to his professional endeavors but also far beyond. An example was his dissertation study of the district in which the new inland capital city of Brazil was to be established *de novo*. A newcomer to the tropics, he not only as expected characterized the previously unstudied soils as to their ability to support the capital agriculturally, but also described the landscape, geomorphic relationships, and native vegetation.

His duties at Cornell were mainly those of helping both professionals and lay people across the state understand the properties of the soils on which they lived and worked. It was a period of intense, county-by-county mapping by teams of state, federal and local soil scientists; each map they produced was accompanied by a text that indicated the merits and deficiencies of each soil series for crop production, road construction, building sites, forestry and recreation. The introduction of each new county survey report touched off a major educational effort directed to bankers, highway engineers, real estate appraisers, and local officials as well as agriculturists. In this effort, Reeshon Feuer was the state leader. It was a task for which he was ideally suited, for he combined a truly

encyclopedic knowledge of our natural resources with a warm and enthusiastic personality, and a dedication to giving the public a maximum return on its investment in the soil surveys. Concurrently he was contributing to the annual college handbook, *Cornell Recommends for Field Crop Production*, and evolving a “par yield” rating system for scores of soil types, an innovation that became part of the environmentalist’s toolbox as well as the assessor’s.

Reeshon was the sort of person about whom a host of stories (some perhaps apocryphal) grew up, and to whom remarkable powers were attributed. It was said that if he were blindfolded and transported to any part of the state, then given a spade and a few minutes to dig, he could identify his location. The maps he carried were continually annotated, to the point where all margins were filled and notations were continued on the back. Some of the maps he derived from the county surveys by lumping kindred units into “associations” employed not only the usual color coding, but also a variety of shaded and polka-dotted patterns that may never before have been known to cartography. His personal compilation of best and thriftiest places to stay and eat in New York State was so highly regarded that it was finally mimeographed for distribution. He knew where the trout lurked, and how to cook them.

In the Philippines, he succeeded in enlisting several previously uncooperative agencies in the publication of a national rice-growing guidebook, a feat many veteran observers had assured him was impossible. Colleague Shaw Reid was not surprised, knowing from long association that “Reesh did 90% of the work and gave others 100% of the credit.” Several Philippine organizations honored him for his service.

Close to home, neighbors relied on him for advice about gardening, hoping to approach his marvels of vegetable production, and when the Feuers moved to the Kendal retirement community, he was immediately selected to guide the establishment of a community garden there. Less akin to his other talents, but again remarkable, was his skill as an investor. His was a guiding voice in an investment club for many years, one so sage that the members have planted a memorial tree to honor him.

Reeshon Feuer’s legacy is in the recollections of his family, coworkers and a host of friends, and in the hands of those who examine his maps and publications. It was a zestful life of service.

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