

William Emerson Mordoff

December 4, 1889 — November 15, 1960

After a full half-century of association with Cornell University as a student and teacher, Professor Emeritus William E. Mordoff died on November 15, 1960, following a short illness.

Professor Mordoff worked his way through both high school and college and graduated from the College of Engineering at Cornell in 1913, receiving the M.E. degree. From 1913 to 1915 he taught physics at Rochester's East High School. In 1915 he returned to Cornell as instructor for one year in the department of Rural Engineering, College of Agriculture. From 1916 until his retirement in 1956, he was a member of the staff of the Sibley School of Mechanical Engineering, serving as instructor in machine design from 1916 to 1918, as instructor in experimental engineering from 1918 to 1923, as instructor in mechanic arts for the year 1923-1924; as Assistant Professor of Machine Construction from 1924 to 1942, as Assistant Professor of Engineering Drawing from 1942 to 1946, and as Associate Professor of Engineering Drawing from 1946 to 1956. He became Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering on July 1, 1956, thus terminating a teaching career of forty-one years on the Cornell campus.

Professor Mordoff was born on December 4, 1889, at Scottsville, New York, the son of Charles and Ann Emerson Mordoff. He had one brother, Richard, who served Cornell as Professor of Meteorology (see the preceding article).

Professor Mordoff's early years were spent in the vicinity of Rochester, New York. He attended primary and secondary schools in Scottsville and Rochester, graduating from West High in 1909. His high school career was interrupted for a time when he left East High to work full time at the Ritter Dental Manufacturing Company. Later, upon entering West High School, he attended classes mornings and continued to work for Ritter afternoons and Saturdays. This early contact with industry influenced his decision to become an engineer and undoubtedly led to his forty-one years of teaching in the field.

Professor Mordoff was extremely versatile in his ability to adapt himself to teaching in whatever department seemed to present a challenge, moving from physics to rural engineering, to machine design, to experimental engineering, to mechanic arts, to machine construction, and finally to engineering drawing. Professor Mordoff was devoted to his teaching and always regarded teaching as his full-time responsibility. He demanded honest labor, neatly and reliably done. His discipline was firm, tempered with gentlemanly counseling, and he was always admired and respected by his students. During his last fourteen years he taught freshman drawing and descriptive geometry.

His earlier experience in more advanced courses provided an excellent background as a basis for stimulating interest in his freshman courses.

Outside the classroom, until recent years, his principal diversion was that of a small-time farmer—purely an avocation. Professor Mordoff possessed a great love for leisurely labor in the out-of-doors. His care for struggling garden plants and flowers coupled with his detestation for weeds was most admirable. However, he and Mrs. Mordoff, the former Elizabeth Cassidy, during the last decade turned their attention to promoting the welfare of animals. Upon retirement, when questioned as to his plans for the future, his stock answer was, “I guess I’m going to the dogs.” He and Mrs. Mordoff maintained an extensive small-animal shelter at their home on West Hill and over the years cared and provided medical attention for literally hundreds of homeless dogs, cats, birds, and other small creatures, many of whom he personally rescued through the volunteer services of the Animal Emergency Club, which was started by Mrs. Mordoff. Seldom were there less than twelve to fourteen animals at any one time that were receiving their kindly attention.

Those who knew him well cannot forget the twinkling eyes and genial conversations, generally occasioned under a shade tree while sitting on a bench or leaning on a hoe handle.

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