

Ethel Wiley Samson

May 3, 1918 — July 4, 2002

Born in Fall River, Massachusetts, the daughter of William and Rachel Wiley Samson, Professor Ethel Samson was a “New Englander,” living in Massachusetts and Rhode Island before moving to New York State. Following graduation from Nassau College in Maine in 1941 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics, she was an Assistant Dietitian at Women’s Hospital, Boston, and later an Administrative Dietitian at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island. In these positions, she taught nutrition to student nurses and to Red Cross Dietetic Aides in addition to other responsibilities. She later studied at Columbia University earning a Master’s degree in 1947.

Professor Samson began a distinguished career of over thirty years in Cornell Cooperative Extension when she became an extension educator in Ulster and Rensselaer counties in 1947. In 1956, she was recruited from the field to join the Cornell Cooperative Extension administrative staff in the College of Human Ecology with responsibility for program leadership and supervision of extension home economists in northern New York. Promoted to Associate Professor with tenure in 1961, she was appointed Staff Development Officer for the statewide extension system with a joint appointment in the Colleges of Human Ecology and Agriculture and Life Sciences. A long time interest of Professor Samson was in continuing education for mature women recognizing the dearth of programs directed to advanced educational opportunities for them. In study leaves and sabbatics, she investigated approaches and actions of others across the country in addressing the needs of women in career development. In her position as Staff Development Officer, she was instrumental in establishing a nationwide process to recruit high caliber extension staff for the New York system; in upgrading staff competencies through the development and coordination of in-service education opportunities from both colleges; and in providing staff with counseling on their careers and professional development. Her effective pursuit of excellence in staff employed by county associations contributed greatly to the success of extension’s diversified programs for the people of New York State. The alternatives she recommended enabled staff both to build career ladders acceptable to them and to meet challenges in providing educational programs to a complex society.

During her career at Cornell, she served on college/university committees focused upon searches for extension administrators; extension curriculum; career ladders and continuing education for staff; educational policy and field study for undergraduates. She represented the College of Human Ecology on the Faculty Council of Representatives for a two-year term and was a member of the Provost’s Advisory Committee on the Status of

Women. Professor Samson also accepted national assignments to work on personnel management and staff development issues with the United States Department of Agriculture – Extension, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), and the National 4-H Council.

She was professionally active in the Adult Education Association of the U.S., the American Dietetic Association, the American Home Economics Association (AHEA – now American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences), the American Society for Training and Development, Epsilon Sigma Phi, the national Association of Extension Home Economists (now National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences). She chaired the Educational Grants Committee in Epsilon Sigma Phi. During her fifty-year membership, Professor Samson served elective terms in AHEA – New York State as district president, committee chair, state treasurer, president-elect/president, and she also served as officer and chair of the Home and Family Life Section in the Adult Education Association. She was recognized for her leadership in staff orientation/in-service education by Epsilon Sigma Phi in 1970, for meritorious service by the Adult Education Association in 1976, and for career counseling by AHEA – New York in 1982.

Professor Samson became an active community volunteer after her retirement in 1982. She assisted the staff at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County by helping with a consumer hot-line, and, with others, establishing Housing Options for Seniors Today (HOST), a joint project of extension and the County Office for Aging that identified alternative housing solutions for the elderly. She served as the first chair of the HOST Advisory Committee. In addition, she chaired the Economic Vitality Program Committee and served on the Board of Directors of the Tompkins' Extension Association. Continuing her affiliation with Cornell, she was president of the Association of Cornell University Emeritus Professors. She also led a successful fund-raising effort to establish the first endowed Extension Chair in Family Policy¹ for the College of Human Ecology. She was presented with the Dean's Distinguished Leadership Award in 1993.

A Remembrance Tea honoring Professor Ethel Samson was held on Saturday, July 27, 2002 at Kendal at Ithaca. Services with internment in Spring Grove Cemetery, Northampton, Massachusetts were private. She is survived by her brother, Donald A. Samson, of Newport News, Virginia; two nephews, William D. Samson, of Northport, Alabama, and James G. Samson, of New York City; and a grand nephew, Stephen Samson, of New York City.

She is deeply missed by family, friends, and colleagues.

Mary Morrison, Bettie Lee Yerka

¹ The Hazel E. Reed Human Ecology Extension Professorship in Family Policy
Cornell University Faculty Memorial Statement <http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/17813>