

# Alpheus W. Smith

*March 29, 1898 — January 23, 1977*

Professor Smith, who taught human relations, joined the Cornell faculty in 1946 and retired as professor emeritus in 1966. During his twenty years in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations he taught in both the extension program and the resident instruction program of the school. He was for many years assistant director and for several years director of extension, the school's statewide adult education program.

Born at Lake Arrowhead, California, Professor Smith moved in 1905 to Ithaca, New York, with his parents, the late professors Albert W. and Ruby Green Smith. He graduated from Ithaca High School in 1915 and entered Cornell the same year. As a student at Cornell, Smith was active in student affairs, including Theta Delta Chi, Aleph Samach, and Quill and Dagger; and he was editor-in-chief of the *Cornell Daily Sun*.

He left college for military service in 1918, having been promoted from Private to second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Artillery by 1919, when he returned to Cornell to complete his A.B. degree. After graduation Smith was employed by Standard Oil of New York as an accountant and office manager in Turkey and Greece.

Upon his return to the United States, Smith started his teaching career in literature at the University of Minnesota where he also did part-time graduate work. In 1922 he married Launette Nichols, art and English teacher, and a graduate of the University of Wisconsin. Later he joined the faculty of Northwestern University, completed a Ph.D. in English and German philology at Harvard, and returned to Northwestern where he taught contemporary American, English, and European literature for over fifteen years.

During his years at Northwestern, Smith became well known not only as an excellent teacher and college administrator, but also as a broadcaster and radio director of educational programs. Among the best known of his programs was the CBS weekly "Of Men and Books." In the summer of 1937, he participated in the American Today Program of the British Broadcasting System. He was also active in professional and community organizations and held various offices in the North Shore Cooperative Society, the Evanston University Club, the Chicago Council for Democratic Action, and Locals 400 and 635 of the American Federation of Teachers. He served for many years as secretary and later as chairman of the Prose Fiction Section of the Modern Language Association.

In 1942 Smith took a leave from his teaching duties at Northwestern to serve with the armed forces during World War II. He directed the Army School in Lexington, Virginia, and organized two overseas schools, one in Naples,

Italy, and another in Honolulu. He was field director of the Army Information Unit in the Central and South Pacific and of similar units in the Netherlands and Germany. Smith wound up his active army career even more directly involved in planning and implementing innovative educational programs.

Smith became chief of the Schools Branch, Office of the Provost Marshal General in June of 1945 and from then until July of 1946 was involved in the program designed to furnish instruction in democratic citizenship to German prisoners of war who were to be returned to Germany to assist in its reconstruction. After serving as commandant of three army schools in Rhode Island, he became commander-in-chief and commandant of the special project center in Fort Eustis, Virginia, from which selected prisoners of war were sent back to Germany for repatriation.

It was a dramatic story made public only after the program had been in operation for over a year and a half and the Fort Eustis project was underway. Columnist Quentin Reynolds spent several days at Fort Eustis. In an article in *Colliers*, May 25, 1946, he wrote the following tribute to Smith: "The whole atmosphere of Fort Eustis is a reflection of the personality of Colonel Alpheus Smith, and if it begins to look as though I were completely overboard on this big guy with the odd first name, you're right. He is one hell of an American, a man with a great intellectual gift and the humility of the true scholar."

Smith's attributes as a scholar, a man of letters, and educator par excellence and his experience with management made him a most attractive candidate for the faculty of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations that was just getting started at Cornell. He was appointed to the faculty in 1946 as professor of industrial and labor relations and as assistant director of extension.

Smith played a decisive role in the development of the school's extension program, establishing a strong and enduring link between practitioners in industrial and labor relations and the world of ideas. In his first years at Cornell, Smith lectured in every major city in New York State and inspired interest in the school and its programs. He introduced many innovations in adult education, including courses for training trainers and human relations courses for managers, supervisors, and training specialists. Associates remember Smith as an inspirational teacher of students in the resident program as well as of practitioners in the field. His humanistic philosophy emerged in his teaching as did his deep social commitment and emphasis on the responsibilities of both labor and management.

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