

# Byron Burnett Robb

*August 8, 1882 — July 8, 1961*

Byron Burnett Robb, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Engineering, died on July 8, 1961 after a long illness. He was born at Webster, New York, on August 8, 1882, to Frances and Charles Robb.

He attended the rural school at Webster, New York, and in 1904 graduated from Webster High School. After a year of postgraduate study at the same school he was granted a three-year certificate to teach in rural schools of the state.

From 1905 to 1907 he taught in School District No. 7, Town of Webster, Monroe County. In the fall of 1907 he entered Cornell University as a freshman and in 1911 received the degree of B.S. in agriculture. In the spring of 1909, his sophomore year, he was employed as a student assistant to Professor H. W. Riley, head of the Department of Farm Mechanics (now the Department of Agricultural Engineering), which position he held until graduation. After graduation he was appointed an instructor in the same department and continued his studies as a graduate student. In 1913 he received the degree of M.S. in agriculture from Cornell. He was the first student at Cornell, and one of the first in the country, to make his major study for an advanced degree in the field of what is now known as agricultural engineering. He pioneered research in this field.

On August 7, 1912, he married Miss Georgia Bills of Union Hill, New York. To this union were born two daughters, Mrs. Frances (Robb) Bowman and Mrs. Julia Ann (Robb) Newman, both of Cayuga, New York. At his death there were ten grandchildren.

In 1913, after receiving his Master's degree he was appointed Assistant Professor of Agricultural Engineering and in 1919 was promoted to Professor. He served in this capacity until June, 1950, when he retired with the rank of Professor Emeritus. During the period 1945-1947 he was head of the department.

During the summers of 1911 to 1915 he was drainage engineer for the New York State Department of Agriculture. In the school year 1923-1924 he studied in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. During World War II, as a member of the Farm Machinery Division of the Emergency Food Commission of the New York State War Council, he organized a corps of twelve district agricultural engineers who did outstanding service to the state and the nation in mechanizing agriculture for greater food production.

Professor Robb's outstanding ability as a teacher was not limited to the Cornell campus. He pioneered extension work in his field and was project leader in extension in his department until 1935. He knew New York agriculture and understood New York farmers. His exceptional ability to interpret technical subject matter into the farmer's language and his unerring judgment on what was best for agriculture made his extension work extraordinarily effective. Under his direction the extension program in agricultural engineering in New York State became one of the best known and most highly regarded in the nation. He pioneered many of the aspects of present-day extension in agricultural engineering.

In addition to his extension work Professor Robb managed to carry on considerable resident instruction. At one time or another he taught most of the early courses offered by the department. His outstanding achievement in resident teaching was the organization and development of a course in household mechanics for women students. Here, as in his extension work, his ability to explain technical subject matter in nontechnical terms opened a new world of experience to the woman student. The large enrollment in his classes over a period of many years is indicative of his success. At no other institution has such a course been so successful.

In addition to his extension and undergraduate teaching he skillfully and understandingly guided many graduate students through their studies and their research. Many of his graduate students now hold important positions throughout this country and abroad. He also gave freely of his time and sound advice to younger men of the department. He never turned down a sincere appeal for help from anyone.

Professor Robb was senior author of the book *Farm Engineering* (1924) and was author and co-author of a number of extension bulletins. His unusual ability to criticize constructively and to edit what other members of the department wrote has left his mark on most of the books and bulletins published in the department during the past fifty years.

In addition to his work at Cornell, Professor Robb gave a brief series of lectures at Ohio State, Missouri, and Columbia Universities. He was chairman of the G.L.F. Conference Board and was special consultant to the industrial and agricultural machinery section of the Standards Division O.P.A. during World War II. He was active in his professional society, the American Society of Agricultural Engineers, and served a term as chairman of the North Atlantic section of the society.

Active in fraternal and civic affairs, he was a thirty-second-degree Mason and for 31 years was trustee of the Ithaca Masonic Temple Corporation. In March, 1961, he received a Masonic fifty-year service pin. He was a past president

of the Acacia Alumni Corporation and a member of Phi Kappa Phi and Epsilon Sigma Phi. He was a member of the Grange for fifty-three years. For many years he was a member of the Tompkins County Fish and Game Club and served as a merit badge examiner for both Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts of the local councils. He belonged to the Episcopal Church.

Those who knew him as “Professor Robb” also knew him as a friend. He will be missed by a multitude of people whose lives have been enhanced by his long years of faithful service to his state and to his nation.

*O. C French, R. H. Wheeler, F. B. Wright*