

# Marlin G. Cline

*December 31, 1909 — January 9, 2009*

Marlin G. Cline, Professor of Soil Genesis and Classification, spent a productive 35-year career at Cornell during which he pursued his love for soil science in general and soil classification in particular. He died on January 9, 2009 at the age of 99 in Ithaca, New York. He is survived by his wife, Agnes and son, Richard.

Marlin Cline was born December 31, 1909 and raised on a small pioneer dairy farm in Bertha, Minnesota. He spent six years operating the farm after high school before obtaining a B.S. degree from North Dakota Agricultural College in 1935. He was then employed for several years with the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station and the United States Department of Agriculture carrying out soil surveys in North Dakota, Hawaii and Tennessee. Marlin studied for a Ph.D. degree at Cornell under the guidance of Professor Richard Bradfield, graduating in 1942. He was then hired by Cornell for teaching and research in soil classification and geography, but was granted leave during World War II for strategic intelligence involving soil conditions affecting military movements in Asia. Showing a wry sense of humor, he later also recounted how he became involved in growing dandelions as a bio-oil crop and how difficult this was compared to the ease with which they always seemed to grow as a weed.

Following the war, Marlin became deeply involved in methods of soil classification and was widely recognized as an authority in this area. He and Guy Smith, a U.S.D.A. scientist, were largely responsible for the development of the current U.S. Soil Taxonomy system. Many brown bag lunch hours with colleagues included tales about the scientific controversies, debates and personalities involved as this system evolved. Concurrently with his U.S.-based work, Marlin travelled extensively in the tropics, beginning in 1949 with participation in a U.S. team to inventory soil resources and agriculture in the British East African territories, continuing in 1955-56 as leader of a Cornell team assisting in the rebuilding of the College of Agriculture at the University of the Philippines, Los Baños after its destruction by the Japanese in WWII, return visits to Africa in the 1960s with Cornell teams looking at animal health and to Brazil as the agricultural potential of the savannah region near the newly founded capital, Brasilia, was being explored. In the 1950s, he also represented the U.S. at a Paris conference on agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa and served on the President's panel on World Food Supplies. In 1958, during the cold war, he was a member of a State Department mission to appraise resources and research on soil and water in the Soviet Union. These international travels and activities influenced him greatly. He became a promoter for international agriculture at Cornell and instigated a tropical soils program when he served as chair of the Department of Agronomy from 1963-70.

Marlin was a person with a great awareness for both detail and broad vision and applied his knowledge from local to global scales. His 1960s bulletin on the survey of Cornell University Lands was used by many graduate students and faculty. His work in Brazil contributed to the development of what has become one of the world's major agricultural regions. He was also the lead faculty person involved in the design and construction of the Bradfield-Emerson Hall building complex. He was succinct in expression, both verbal and written, and always to the point. At age 96, in a small meeting at his house with soil survey personnel, he said, "soil scientists can't wait to see what is on the other side of the hill". Marlin imparted this enthusiasm together with his wisdom and philosophy of science to those whom he mentored throughout his professional life, including students, faculty and professionals in the Natural Resource Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service). His contributions to soil science were recognized by honorary doctorate degrees from North Dakota State University and Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland; by election as a Fellow of the American Society of Agronomy, the Soil Science Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the New York Farmers Award.

Marlin had a strong sense of history, undoubtedly developed from the pioneer spirit of his family and his own early farming experiences. Following retirement, he chronicled the history of the Department of Agronomy from 1868-80. This document provides enormous insight into that department and also to the factors that influenced the development of agricultural science at Cornell and in the United States. Together with his family, he contributed to a current Smithsonian museum exhibit, *"Dig It! The Secrets of Soil"*, which in many ways exemplifies his life's work.

*John M. Duxbury, Chairperson; Gary W. Fick, Harold van Es*