Gerald A. Marx

March 7, 1930 — November 13, 1988

Gerald A Marx, professor of horticultural sciences at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva was a modest man with high ideals. He was a dedicated scholar, a keen researcher, and a respected faculty colleague. This combination of personal attributes characterized his 29 years on the Cornell faculty and made possible his many accomplishments during his shortened career.

Gerry was born in Wisconsin. He went to the University of Wisconsin, where he received a B.S., an M.A., and the Ph.D. degree in genetics and plant breeding.

He joined the Geneva faculty as an assistant professor of vegetable crops in 1959. Gerry became a world–renowned authority on the breeding and genetics of vegetable crops, including improvements on tomatoes, winter squash, carrots, beets, and peas. It was on peas, however where his greatest attention and devotion were centered, and where he emerged in time as one of only a few scientists in the world with active genetic germplasm collections.

Gerry was one of the founders of the Pisum Genetics Association, a worldwide organization which puts out a newsletter devoted to pea genetics. For about 20 years he was editor of that newsletter and maintained an office at Geneva for that purpose. He was also an active member of the National Pea Improvement Association, composed of university and USDA scientists, as well as representatives from the commercial green- and dry-pea industry, and from major pea processing companies. He was also a regular contributor to their annual workshop.

His contributions in pea genetics were many. Being a strong believer in basic research, he recognized that the identification of individual gene action, their placement on linkage groups, and putting together specific gene combinations would make the pea genetic stocks most useful to both basic and practical science programs. This research became a key source of pea germplasm for researchers from a wide range of scientific disciplines. And more specifically, in later years he became interested in the role of genes in developmental morphology, and authored a comprehensive review of this field of research.

As a plant breeder, he utilized his knowledge of pea genetics to incorporate novel and potentially valuable genes into germplasm lines which were then released to pea seed companies for their use in the release of new varieties. Some examples were: high seed number per pod, incorporation of multiple disease resistance to mildew and

viruses, use of genes which reduce foliage on the plant, high triple podding, and the use of multiple gene action to greatly concentrate the set of flowers and pods.

While Gerry had some disdain for the process of research administration, his devotion to duty to Cornell, along with his personal attributes, made him susceptible to being drafted as acting department chairman. This happened on numerous occasions, from a few days, to a few weeks, to even more than a year's duration. A measure of his success is to be found in the ongoing acceptance of him as an administrator by faculty and staff.

During the last eleven years of his life, Gerry and his wife Mary Lou shared the knowledge that he had a terminal illness with only several very close friends. At the same time, he intensified his attention to his research programs, wanting to get as much accomplished during the time he had left.

In addition to the organizations mentioned above, Gerry was a member of the American Society for Advancement of Science, American Genetic Association, American Institute of Biological Science, American Phytopathological Society, American Society for Horticultural Science, American Society of Agronomy, Botanical Society of America, and Sigma Xi.

The primary legacy left by Gerry Marx is a pea genetic germplasm collection that is probably unequalled in the world. The challenge will be to find a scientist and location that can continue the great works done by this respected scientist.

Michael Dickson, Richard W. Robinson, Donald W. Barton