

# Forrest F. Hill

*December 30, 1900 — October 20, 1988*

For 25 years, “Frosty” Hill contributed to Cornell as a teacher and administrator. He came to Cornell as a graduate student in 1923 after having completed his bachelor’s degree at the University of Saskatchewan. He was appointed as an assistant professor in 1929, and within a year was promoted to full professor, an indication of his status within the faculty.

Hill’s teaching career at Cornell was interrupted in the 1930s by a succession of appointments to the Farm Credit Administration in Washington. He and W.I. Myers (later to become Dean of the College of Agriculture) were asked by President Roosevelt and Henry Morgenthau to help rescue farmers from the financial crisis then facing agriculture. From 1933 to 1938, Hill served as special assistant and deputy governor of the reorganized farm lending agency. The new organization successfully refinanced millions of farm loans and helped bail out local banks whose assets were tied up in farm mortgages. In 1938, Hill succeeded Myers as Governor of the Farm Credit Administration.

In 1939, Hill returned to Cornell as professor of land economics and devoted his energies to teaching and directing the work of graduate students. He became involved in studies designed to identify areas of New York State where farming was likely to remain unprofitable because of poor soil, unfavorable terrain, and inadequate rural services, including poor roads. Frosty was as much concerned with families displaced from agriculture as with land that had been made obsolete because of technical changes in farming. Successive generations of his graduate students were sent out to find out what was going on in rural areas of the state, and to identify those characteristics of land contributing to success or failure in farming.

Frosty had a colorful way of making points. His lectures were filled with metaphors and witty comments. Students forgot details of land tenure laws and credit arrangements, but they remembered his description of impoverished hill farms producing mainly “poverty grass and goldenrod.” The principal function of poor soil areas he quipped, was to “hold the world together.” Upland farms often commanded an excellent view of the valley below, but students were reminded that “you can’t pay off the mortgage with a view.”

Graduate students looked forward to informal sessions in Frosty’s office during which the breadth of his interest in social as well as economic issues became apparent. He was noted for his quick response to questions, often formulating an answer before the student had quite finished asking the question. Graduate students also

appreciated the invitations to breakfast at the Hills' home where the conversation ranged widely and always with good-humored comments from the professor. Talking with Frosty was as stimulating to colleagues as it was to graduate students because of his quick mind, wide-ranging interests and enthusiasm. He possessed a remarkable capacity to identify what was relevant to a particular problem, and to synthesize ideas.

In 1943, Hill became head of the Department of Agricultural Economics, a position he held for nine years. During this period, he continued to serve on a number of special commissions, including one which recommended a new pricing formula for milk, and another which dealt with the future of Ithaca and the surrounding areas. Frosty also was a member of a distinguished group of agricultural economists who were asked to recommend changes in existing farm policies. In 1949, he was elected President of the Farm Economics Association (later to become the American Agricultural Economics Association), and in 1966 was named as a Fellow of the Association, in recognition of his contributions to the profession.

In 1952, when President Malott asked Hill to become Provost of the University, the only instructions given to him by President Malott were "to work with him while he was on the campus and to act for him while he was away." Frosty carried out these instructions energetically and in a manner that pleased the President, the faculty, and the Board of Trustees.

In 1955, Hill left Ithaca to head the Overseas Development Program of the Ford Foundation. He was recruited for this position by Rowan Gaither, a family friend and colleague dating back to the early days of the Farm Credit Administration in Washington. Gaither was then president of the Ford Foundation. Frosty was persuaded that more ought to be done to improve the technology of food production, especially in Asia. He convinced the Ford Foundation that they ought to join forces with the Rockefeller Foundation in funding an international research program devoted to rice. This took the form of constructing and staffing the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. The success of IRRI in developing new high-yielding varieties of rice led Hill to propose establishing additional international research centers, including one in Africa and another in South America. He served for a number of years on the governing boards of two of these centers. Buildings have been named in his honor at both IRRI and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Hill was an innovator in seeking funds for the international centers as well as in creating them. He recognized at an early stage in their development that funding requirements for the centers would soon outrun the capacity of the Ford and Rockefeller foundations to support them. Hill's leadership was instrumental in bringing together a small group of internationally-minded individuals at the Rockefeller Foundation Conference Center in Bellagio,

Italy, to discuss funding arrangements. This led ultimately to the formation of a consortium of donors that now provide most of the support for the international centers.

Frosty found the challenge of attempting to increase food production stimulating and satisfying. After retiring from his position as vice-president of the Ford Foundation, he remained active for 10 years as a consultant to the Foundation and traveled widely on special assignments, usually accompanied by his wife, Lillian, a trained geneticist, and occasionally by his daughter, Peggy.

After retiring from the Ford Foundation, Frosty returned to Ithaca. Friends continued to enjoy his company at informal dinners in the Rathskeller and delighted in hearing his fund of stories, including many based on his recollections of growing up on a wheat farm in Saskatchewan.

Frosty's influence extended well beyond his tenure as a professor at Cornell. Several of his students have become distinguished members of the profession, including one who is now Director of the International Food Policy Research Institute, and another who is vice-president of the World Bank.

Few individuals have been able to achieve success in so many different areas including teaching, administration, and innovation in international research. He will be remembered as a great conversationalist and a delightful companion.

Frosty is survived by his daughter, Margaret Hill, of Fayetteville, New York.

*Randolph Barker, Daniel G. Sisler, Kenneth L. Robinson*