

Orrilla Wright Butts

June 25, 1904 — March 21, 1987

Orrilla Wright Butts was one of those rare individuals whose personality radiated warmth and friendliness. She had a delightful sense of humor and a quick wit that often broke the strain of a tense moment. Those qualities, plus her sincere faith in people and in their ability to help themselves, inspired confidence and encouraged families to participate in cooperative extension programs. Homemakers and colleagues alike valued her vision, leadership, and ability to develop educational programs that met the needs of families—and particularly of women—of the depression and war-torn years. She was known to her friends and colleagues as Ril.

Ril came to the College of Home Economics in 1935 as an assistant professor in cooperative extension and assistant state leader of home demonstration agents to provide leadership for the home economics program in New York State. Later she was promoted to professor in extension, coordinator of extension in the College of Home Economics, and state leader of home demonstration agents.

Ril worked to strengthen the local leadership system in New York State, where college faculty taught groups of leaders who in turn taught others in the community. She encouraged local women to serve on county program advisory committees. She obtained much satisfaction in observing the personal development of people who assumed leadership roles.

Ril was one of Cornell's effective ambassadors to those from foreign countries seeking guidance in the establishment of an extension program. She was in much demand to talk to representatives from war-torn countries to discuss the involvement of the local people in developing educational programs to strengthen home and community living. In 1949, in recognition of her interest, Ril was selected as a visiting consultant in home economics for the United States army of occupation assigned to the food, agriculture, and forestry division of the British army of occupation in Germany. One of her many responsibilities was working with committees to plan for the establishment of two new home economics institutes (colleges of home economics) with Marshall Plan aid.

Ril's ability to work successfully with people played an important role in creating understanding of the legislative decision to separate the Home Bureau from home economics extension work. Her vision for educational programs based on resources of the College of Home Economics and for audience outreach was key in directing the extension effort. Ril also had the ability to gain support of faculty and administrators at state, county, and university levels to

focus programs for people in all socioeconomic groups. This effort is now the basis for the current home economics extension program.

Ril's special assignments while employed at the college included many community and statewide commitments. She served on the WGY radio and television planning committee during the station's pioneer effort to secure homemakers' participation. She was also an adviser to the New York State Council of Rural Women and the New York State Federation of Home Bureaus. She was a member of the University Committee on Adult Education, the Intra-College Committee on Extension Studies, and the New York State College of Home Economics Scholarship Committee. In addition, she wrote articles for publications, including *Forecast* and *Better Farms*.

In 1954 Ril represented the college at the ninth annual Conference on Citizenship, in Washington, D.C. The following year she received the Merit Award from the Cornell chapter of Epsilon Sigma Phi, a national honorary extension fraternity. At that time she was cited for her ability as a teacher, an organizer, and an administrator and for her forthrightness in meeting problems.

In 1957 secretary of agriculture Ezra Benson presented Ril with the Superior Service Award "for devoted and unselfish leadership, for faith in people and respect for their ability, for skill in the multitudes of human relationships that characterize the extension service."

Her alma mater, Rochester Institute of Technology, recognized her statewide leadership role by awarding her the Margaret Gillam award on October 14, 1972. The citation was "for outstanding professional contributions to the field of home economics through the extension service."

During her retirement she and her husband traveled widely, including spending a year abroad. Ril was an avid reader and a fan of the *New York Times* crossword puzzle. Ril enjoyed playing bridge and the people with whom she played. She served on the board of the Friends of the Tompkins County Library and on the board of the Service League. Ril was the widow of Professor George S. Butts, who predeceased her on June 25, 1975.

Ril was born in Perry, New York, the daughter of Allen James and Minnie Goodridge Wright. She earned a teaching certificate in 1924 from the Mechanics Institute in Rochester (Rochester Institute of Technology) and her Bachelor of Science degree in home economics in 1926 from the University of Rochester. She did postgraduate work at Cornell and Columbia universities.

Ril was a true friend and colleague and is greatly missed.

Carolyn O. Boegly, Hazel E. Reed, Ethel W. Samson