

George Gordon Gyrisco

March 25, 1920 — July 14, 1989

George Gyrisco was born in the town of South Hadley in western Massachusetts. He was the son of immigrant parents, and the first member of his family to obtain a college degree. The American dream was very real to George. He never took for granted a system that provided an opportunity for study in an area of one's passionate interest. Motivated by this outlook, he entered Massachusetts State College and earned the Bachelor of Science degree, *summa cum laude*, in 1943. At that time, his alma mater enjoyed preeminence in entomological training at the undergraduate level, a staging area for promising graduate students. George was greatly influenced by several members of this distinguished faculty. His devotion and respect for them continued undiminished as a positive force throughout his professional career. Years later, as a mature faculty member, he enjoyed reminiscing on his undergraduate experience with a freshness of events as if they had transpired only recently.

George was awarded the Ph.D. degree by Cornell in 1947, and joined the entomology faculty following graduation. He advanced rapidly through the ranks to full professor in 1954. In 1962 he was appointed department head. His early professional career coincided with the surge of agricultural technology following World War II. He became a leader in the newly emerging subdiscipline of forage entomology, a specialization in support of the livestock industry, the largest component of the state's agricultural enterprise. He addressed the complex challenge of evaluating new insecticides for use in control of forage insect pests. This involved intricate research into the food chain of the dairy cow, with special attention to the metabolic fate of pesticide residues as potential contaminants of dairy products. George was relentless in his efforts to provide experimental data as a basis for formulating sound programs of insect control. In the sensitive areas of public safety, pesticide use, and the environment, George was committed to the fullest sharing of data as a matter of public trust.

George was an early advocate of biological control. His pioneering research in this area provided alternatives to the intensive use of insecticides in forage insect control. His innovative leadership in the subdiscipline of forage entomology laid the foundation on which current concepts and technologies have been developed.

George was unusually effective in the dual role of training students and advancing research. His training style involved close partnership between professor and student in the research experience, and the rigor, enthusiasm, and institutional loyalty to the Cornell tradition. George supervised the graduate studies of thirty-five students, a number virtually unequalled in the annals of the department. Many of his students have taken their place as

leaders in the field and continue to feel a bond with fellow students who shared the Gyrisco training experience. As one student remarked: “George shared with us. He shared his enthusiasm, his intellect, his philosophy, his home, and on occasion, his wallet. What more could a student have asked?”

To many graduate students Thanksgiving in Ithaca came to mean turkey at “GG’s.” His home was always open to them. In this giving, as in all his dedication, he had the unflagging support of his wife, Valerie.

George was an avid sports fan, one who rooted for the Big Red as a joyful expression of institutional loyalty. His interest beyond the campus included the community youth program, his home, and his garden. He served for many years as scoutmaster of Ithaca Troop 5, BSA. His green thumb was evident in the success of his flower and vegetable garden. His pride and joy was his extensive planting of daffodils. The slopes of their property on Twin Glens Road abounded in spring color. Through George’s characteristic modesty and generosity, bouquets of gorgeous daffodils graced the desks of his departmental associates each spring. His sense of sharing went beyond his graduate students. It included all those who joined with him in advancing the cause of Cornell.

For many years George waged a courageous struggle against a debilitating illness. It was commitment to students and institutional loyalty that evoked his Herculean effort. He disdained disability retirement, and persevered to the normal retirement schedule and emeritus status in 1985.

George seemed never to have lost the awe or enthusiasm of an undergraduate discovering academic freedom as a way of life, and the university as a unique institution in support of those seeking to discover and to share. And on the lighter side, there was the Big Red athletic program. All of this and heaven, too!

George will be remembered for his passionate devotion to Cornell, his professional contributions (two hundred publications), his loyalty to family and youth of the community. His most enduring legacy is the group of students who fell heir to his philosophy. They are the worthy guardians of their mentor’s commitment to intellectual honesty, civility, and academic freedom.

George is survived by his wife, Valerie; daughter, Jill; sons, Geoffrey and Glenn; a sister, Betty; and several nieces and nephews.

Edward H. Smith, Haruo Tashiro, Arthur A. Muka