

Mary E. Purchase

February 17, 1921 — March 6, 1990

Mary Purchase was a member of the Cornell faculty for twenty-eight years prior to her retirement in 1986. She came to Cornell in 1945 as a graduate student in chemistry, having earned the bachelor's degree from Eastern Michigan University in education and mathematics. After completing her masters degree, she was an instructor for three years in the Department of Household Economics and Management in the College of Home Economics. In 1951, she left Cornell to study and teach at Iowa State University, where she earned the Ph.D. degree in household equipment and chemistry in 1957.

After teaching in the Department of Home Management at the University of Tennessee for four years, she returned to Cornell in 1961 as an associate professor in the Department of Household Economics and Management. Upon the college's reorganization in 1969, she became a member of the faculty of the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis in the College of Human Ecology, where she served as graduate faculty representative and department extension leader. In 1973, Dr. Purchase was named professor. With the 1985 reorganization, Professor Purchase became a member of the Department of Textiles and Apparel and was named professor emerita the following year.

As a chemist and home economist, Mary Purchase used her scientific training in research, teaching, and extension in the interests of individuals and families. She was nationally known for her work in household equipment, detergency (particularly related to the phosphate ban), child-guard safety packaging of household products, consumer use of microwave ovens, metrication, and energy use. Teaching materials she developed provided sound and timely information to consumers on widely diverse topics, with particular attention to environmental issues and consumer products. Joint work with business and industry produced voluntary standards and educational materials.

Mary Purchase was active throughout her career on a variety of industry panels and boards. She was named to the Major Appliance Consumer Action Panel at its formation in 1970. This panel, composed of independent consumer specialists, represented consumers at the highest level in the appliance industry. She was also a member of the Technical Advisory Committee on Poison Prevention Packaging (Consumer Product Safety Division), the Evaluation Panel for the Center for Consumer Product Technology (National Bureau of Standards), and the Consumer Advisory Council of Underwriters' Laboratories.

She contributed to the profession of home economics in a wide variety of activities. She held district, state, and national offices in the American Home Economics Association and also served as a member of the editorial board of *Home Economics Research Journal*. She was also a member of the American Chemical Society, the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists, the American Association of University Professors, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Omicron Nu, Sigma Delta Epsilon, Phi Kappa Phi, and the Society of Sigma Xi.

Recognition of Mary Purchase's achievements has taken several forms. In 1971, she was named a distinguished alumna of Iowa State University. In 1972, she received the Pacesetter Award for colleges, universities and research, given by the New York State Home Economics Association. In 1973, the Major Appliance Consumer Action Panel recognized her work in consumer education on appliance energy conservation. The American Home Economics Association named her one of 75 outstanding leaders in the profession in 1984. She was awarded the ASTM Award of Merit in 1986 and was named a fellow of the society, "in recognition of exceptional leadership, acute technical and editorial insights, and for diplomatic recommendations that brought together opposing points of view."

Colleagues, former students, and friends knew Professor Purchase for her scholarship, integrity, intellectual honesty and commitment. She demanded excellence of herself and stimulated her students to raise their own professional standards. For many she was a mentor in the development of their professional careers. She was active on many college and university committees, e.g. the University Academic Integrity Appeals Board, the Review and Procedures Committee, and the College Education Policies Committee.

Her interest in service to people was exemplified by her sabbatical leave in the developing countries of Sudan and Malawi in Africa. In the Sudan she taught home management at Ahfad University College in Khartoum and visited in both urban and villages homes to observe homemaking work and equipment. In Malawi she visited Chancellor College in Zomba where her work involved helping with a new design of a washing slab, and experimenting with insulated cookers and charcoal coolers, as well as lecturing in textiles and housing classes. She felt that there was much that home economists can do in developing countries to make life somewhat easier for women. She had hoped to continue her international work after retirement, but illness prevented such service.

Locally, she was a long time, active member of St. Paul's United Methodist Church where she served as lay leader and in a variety of leadership roles including Nominations, Council on Ministries, Administrative Board, and Finance. She was a member of the board of directors of the Wesley Foundation. Mary motivated others to become active in the church. She received strength from her faith and was respected by both clergy and laity. In addition to

the church, she was a member of the Cayuga Trails Club, participating actively in building and maintaining trails. She had a lifetime interest in sports and outdoor activities.

Professor Purchase had a deep commitment to home economics and human ecology. All of her activities and pursuits had a strong concern for human and social consequences. As the New York State Home Economics Association noted in presenting her with the Pacesetter Award, she was “a champion for consumers” and had “the gift of giving untiringly to her profession, to her job and to people.”

Betty Lewis, Mary Morrison, S. Kay Obendorf