

Robert York

December 21, 1912 — January 7, 1978

Robert York brought to Cornell a broad and expert background in chemical engineering, derived from earlier academic and industrial experience. For more than twenty years he offered soft-spoken guidance and sensitive encouragement to students, colleagues, and friends in this campus community. A devoted and demanding teacher, Professor York gave his students a broad perspective that combined the technical and theoretical with economic, social, and political practicality. His interest in them was maintained long after graduation; their esteem for him grew with the years. Robert York's associates regarded him not only as an outstanding engineer and teacher but also as a warm friend. To lunch with him was a delightful break in the daily routine. Bob was part of a luncheon group that originated at a table in the Willard Straight Hall Memorial Room long before Statler Hall was built. Later this group occupied a Rathskeller round table. Composed largely of senior faculty from several schools and colleges, this gathering represented a great diversity in points of view and training. Its discussions were sharp, the arguments sometimes hilarious and always enjoyable. Here his comments carried weight because they arose from an incisive intellect that was not confused by peripheral matters. His ability to get to the heart of a problem was well recognized, not only with this group, but elsewhere. While he served on the University Senate, discussions of University affairs became a favorite and often entertaining subject. His subtle humor was well chosen, and he was not above leading on some unwitting person to the amusement of others. As the group decreased in number with the retirement, removal, or death of many of the original members, Bob became as much of a chairman as was needed. His eager participation led to many close friendships; his death has left an emptiness that cannot be filled.

Professor York was modest about his achievements, though he held memberships in well-known scholastic and professional societies and was listed in highly regarded directories. Major corporations sought his counsel, as did friends, associates, and students. He was active on many University and professional committees. His interests and capabilities extended far beyond his field of specialization to include economic and financial matters, patents, applied mathematics, and marketing.

Professor York is survived by his sister, Mrs. Morgan K. Cartwright of San Antonio, Texas; two brothers, Jerome B. York of Kentfield, California, and Philip K. York of Prairie Village, Kansas; and by a multitude of friends in all parts of the world who valued his friendship.

Jay E. Hedrick, Shailer S. Philbrick, Raymond G. Thorpe