

William B. Ward

July 16, 1917 — April 27, 2008

William B. Ward came to Cornell as a full professor and department head in 1945 at age 28—after serving as an information specialist in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and War Food Administration during war years 1941-45. He earned a Bachelor's degree from Utah State University and a Master's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1941. He taught in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences for 56 years from 1945 to 2001. He died at age 90 on Sunday, April 27, 2008.

Bill was invited to Cornell to organize and develop a new department that would combine communication production, teaching, extension, and research functions in the newly emerging field of communication for both the College of Agriculture and the College of Home Economics. He mobilized resources to offer courses in agricultural journalism and public speaking and to establish divisions within the new department for the production of publications, visual aids, news services, and radio, television and film. He shifted the scope of the department from one that was originally named Extension Teaching and Information to the more comprehensive Department of Communication Arts (which later became the Department of Communication). During his 26-year tenure as head of the department, Bill assembled a staff of faculty and communication specialists who had a significant impact on the field of agricultural and extension communication in the U.S. Land-grant University system. During his tenure as head of the department (1945-71), the department won more national awards for excellence than any other land-grant university. The department frequently achieved distinction for the exhibits it produced for the New York State Fair. In 1998, he was recognized for these contributions with an Award of Excellence from the internationally recognized organization Agricultural Communicators in Education—the award noting his

“substantial and creative contributions to the communication/information technology profession and leadership involvement over many years in international activities.”

Early in his Cornell career, Bill served as President of the American Association of Agricultural Editors.

Bill's fostering of a strong academic base for the study and practice of communication paved the way for the department to add a new applied graduate degree to its B.S. degree. This was a Master of Professional Studies (Communication) program that was the first of its kind in the country. It was the forerunner and foundation of an expanded graduate program that in later years was to include M.S. and Ph.D. degrees.

Magazine Writing was one of Bill Ward's most popular courses. Often the opening class of the year had more students enrolled than chairs in the classroom, and he would early on whittle the class size down by the rigorous demand of writing for specific publications. In his graduate course on Communication Planning and Strategy, he required students to write case analyses in three pages or fewer to encourage them to concentrate on the essentials in a problem. Much of his writing dealt with practical matters in which transparent communication was essential. His teaching reached beyond the Ithaca campus with the publication of his textbook, *Reporting Agriculture*, which was widely used in the U.S. and abroad. In addition, more than 400 of his articles have been published in national and regional agricultural magazines.

Bill was an early pioneer of Cornell's use of television for educational purposes. In 1962, he participated in the effort to obtain support for a TV Film Center and in 1970 the new Educational TV Center became a reality in the College of Human Ecology, with modern studios and equipment capable of delivering full-color taped programs to a network of 19 television stations. The studios also became a laboratory for the teaching of television production.

In addition to being a teacher and administrator, Bill was a noted professional communicator. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and while he was attached to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, he was assigned to report on available food supplies for Hawaii in case of a blockade of Hawaii. Later, he was a member of the press corps covering a trade mission to South America led by Ezra Taft Benson, the Secretary of Agriculture. His "Washington Connection" continued into the 1970s when he received a USDA grant to plan, write and design media materials for all 50 states to improve the public understanding and image of American agriculture.

Bill was a leader in many projects abroad. When Cornell was deeply involved in institution building in the Philippines during the 1950s, he helped establish a new Department of Agricultural Journalism at the College of Agriculture, University of the Philippines at Los Baños. He subsequently did consulting work on communications and publications at the nearby International Rice Research Institute during its earliest days. During a sabbatical leave in the early 1960s, Bill developed a communication program for Instituto Nacional de Tecnologia Agropecuaria, a nationwide agricultural research and extension agency in Argentina. In the late 1960s, he planned and helped create communication centers at two agricultural universities in India as a part-time consultant for the Ford Foundation. These centers continue to thrive today. In 1972, he became Chief of Party for the University of Tennessee agricultural development program in India sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development. He had the distinction of being one of those forced out of India when Indira Gandhi became unhappy with U.S. Government presence in that country. In India, he also responded to a request by the Director General of the

International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) to plan a communication division for the organization.

In Africa, Bill served as a visiting scientist at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Ibadan, Nigeria. During half-time retirement from 1977-89, he was a communication consultant for IITA for three months each year. One of his special talents was compiling and editing research reports. He carried this skill over into a long-term relationship with the International Agricultural Development Service in Indonesia where he was a communication consultant. He prepared five-year research reports for the country's Agency for Agricultural Research and Development that were published and widely distributed. Bill's involvement with international agricultural research centers also included many months over a five-year period during the 1980s at the International Center for Agricultural Research for the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Aleppo, Syria. Bill's other overseas assignments also took him to Guatemala, Honduras, Taiwan, and Bangladesh.

Bill Ward was a member of the University Faculty during the tenures of seven Cornell presidents. He was appointed Professor Emeritus in 1988, served as Vice President of the Cornell Association of Professors Emeriti, and represented CAPE in the Cornell University Faculty Senate. Soon after the new Kennedy Hall became the home of the Communication Department, a room in the building was named in his honor. Since 1999, there has been a William B. Ward Communication Scholarship for undergraduate students majoring in Communication.

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