

Charles Clyde Russell

September 29, 1919 — July 8, 1988

One of the truly great teachers in the field of Communication, Charlie Russell met his obligations in the truest sense of the word. As former Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Charles E. Palm, often said, “Charlie Russell never failed to put his entire self into whatever assignment he was given.” Using the hallmarks of wit, sincerity, compassion, and a great love for students, Charlie was beloved by all who were fortunate enough to have known him. Perhaps his brother-in-law best summed it up by saying, “every state should have one Charlie Russell.”

At a time when students seemingly suffered daily from strain, burnout, and campus anguish over the Vietnam War and race relations, Charlie Russell provided relief, and a chance to learn and enjoy. For thousands of students, over his 20 years at Cornell, Charlie demonstrated that showmanship and scholarship are not mutually exclusive.

Charlie was a leader in bringing innovation to undergraduate instruction. He was one of the first to use television to extend the teaching in one classroom to “satellite” classrooms. He spent a sabbatic leave in 1973 in Great Britain studying the Open University and visiting major universities in the United States that were noted for their high teaching standards. The following year he and his associates in the department received an award from SUNY for improving the teaching program.

As a teacher and as a human being, he had the unique ability to evoke joy and laughter no matter what the circumstances. Charlie was known for his ability to make teaching come alive, as evidenced by his having developed and taught two of the most popular courses in the department of communication: “Introduction to Mass Media” and “Advertising and Promotion.”

An example of his ingenuity was a pre-arranged class incident using a campus patrolman as his “partner in crime.” Halfway through a lecture there came a rap at the door, and the patrolman asked Charlie to remove his car from a no-parking zone. Charlie agreed, but indicated that he was in the middle of a lecture and would take care of it as soon as possible. After two more appearances by the man in blue, the discussion became increasingly heated and eventually resulted in a shoving match. At this point the officer pulled his gun, loaded with blanks, and fired. After falling to the floor, Charlie quickly jumped up and instructed the class to write a news article on the incident they had just observed. Students in the class probably never forgot the lesson of that day.

Charlie's education was truly southern-based. Following service with the Navy Intelligence from 1942-45, he received his Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of Texas in 1948 and a Master of Journalism from the same institution the following year. He earned his Ph.D. degree at the School of Journalism from the University of Missouri in 1968.

Following his World War II service, Charlie was invited to join the faculty of Arkansas Polytechnic College, and from 1949-51 was chairman of its Department of Journalism and Director of Public Relations. After the next year as chairman of the Department of Journalism at Howard College in Birmingham, Alabama, he left academia to join the public relations bureau of the Portland Cement Association. While there, he prepared "The Cement Story," a publication used throughout the country as a supplementary text for high school science courses.

But Charlie missed the daily contact with students. During the academic year 1956-57 he returned to teaching, this time as a visiting professor at Cornell in what was then the Department of Extension Teaching and Information. At the end of that academic year, students took the unusual step of petitioning the dean to keep him as a member of the faculty. There not being an opening at that time, Charlie left for the University of Arkansas where he served as chairman of the Department of Journalism for two years. By then a position was available, and he returned to Cornell where he was granted tenure in 1963 and made a full professor in 1969.

For 15 years, including a two-year term as department chairman, Charlie charmed students, faculty and administrators alike. During his years at Cornell, he was a much sought-after speaker for county Cooperative Extension functions and for Cornell Club meetings. His sense of humor, enthusiasm, and stage talents made him a favorite master-of-ceremonies for many community events, including the venerable Savage Club. His election to Alpha Zeta was testimony to his leadership and scholarship in agriculture.

Charlie contributed in many ways to the Department of Communication during its years of rapid growth and its transition from a largely service unit to an academic unit with undergraduate majors and a masters program. Indeed, he left his mark on many parts of Cornell and its institutions. Each year he was advisor to more than 50 undergraduate and graduate students; he served on a long list of college and university committees; and he served on the *Cornell Daily Sun* Board of Directors, as faculty advisor to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Student Council and as chairman of the Faculty Committee for Minority Programs.

Meanwhile Charlie participated actively in professional activities outside Cornell, including affiliation with the American Agriculturalist Foundation, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the Advertising Research Foundation, Sigma Delta Chi, and Toastmasters International.

But the lure of his hometown of Russellville, Arkansas was just too great. In 1978 he was granted the title of professor emeritus at Cornell, and for one year served as Dean of Liberal and Fine Arts at Arkansas Tech. But administration was not his first love.

The University of South Carolina had long known of Charlie's talents as a teacher, so it was not a difficult decision for him to accept a professorship in its Department of Journalism. During his five years at South Carolina, Charlie devoted his summers to communication training with public affairs officers in the United States Army. Finally, in 1985 Charles E. Russell became a professor emeritus for the second time and retired to Birmingham, Alabama. But it didn't last long. Soon he was invited to join the Superior Federal Bank in Fort Smith, Arkansas, as its education and training coordinator, working with the bank's employees throughout the state. He held that position until his untimely death.

Charles Russell died July 8, 1988 at the age of 68, after being stricken with an inoperable malignant brain tumor. He will be sorely missed by all who knew and loved him. He is survived by his wife of 34 years, Mary Barnard Russell of Fort Smith, Arkansas; two daughters, Patti Lu Hill of Fort Smith, and Kimberly Brueggemann of Baltimore, Maryland; and six grandchildren.

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