

Laura Lee Whitely Weisbrodt Smith

July 16, 1903 — February 28, 1993

This past February the Hotel School lost one of its best known and most loved faculty members, Dr. Laura Lee Smith.

Laura Lee was born in Georgetown, Ohio in 1903. She graduated from the St. Bernard, Ohio public schools and was the only female to receive a B.S. degree in chemistry from Miami University of Ohio in 1925. Laura Lee continued her education earning an M.S. degree in chemistry from Iowa State University in 1927 and the first Ph.D. degree in nutrition from the University of California at Berkeley, in 1930.

In June of 1927, Laura Lee married Ora Smith in the Rose Gardens at Iowa State University. They spent the next 65 years together, both enjoying outstanding careers at Cornell.

Laura Lee began her Cornell career in the Home Economics Department, teaching from 1937 to 1942. After some time away and the birth of her son, James Stanley, and daughter, Sarah Jane (Burton), she returned to Cornell as professor of food chemistry in the School of Hotel Administration, teaching there from 1956 to 1972.

During this time Laura Lee became the quintessential expression of the concept that “good things come in small packages.” Although small of stature, she rose to become one of the University’s best lecturers and perhaps the most energetic and revered faculty member at the Hotel School. Laura Lee made chemistry come alive for her students. She played a major role in creating a generation of hotelmen and restaurateurs who were not only technically competent but strong decision makers as well, due in part to Laura Lee’s teaching that the scientific method applied to life as well as chemistry. She was well known in the Hotel School for expecting disciplined excellence, and her students’ commitment to excellence carried well past their days in chemistry class.

Laura Lee was quite active outside the classroom. Professionally, she was author and editor of *Food Service Science*, published in 1974. Her research interests addressed the uses of modified starches in packaged food products as well as the breakdown of cooking oils in the frying process. She was a member of the American Chemical Society, the Institute of Food Technologists, and a fellow of the American Institute of Chemists and the New York Academy of Sciences. She also served as a nutrition consultant to the Inter-American Institute, Turrialba, Costa Rica, from 1946-48.

In the community, Laura Lee was an active volunteer for the American Red Cross, the Girl Scouts, and Sampson Air Force Base Hospital during World War II. She was a charter and life member of the Finger Lakes Kennel Club and authored its history. She served as chairperson of the Bethel Grove School Board, was founding treasurer of the Ithaca Ballet Company and taught math and science in the Ithaca public school system.

Laura Lee had a tremendous affinity for the out-of-doors, devoting time to her garden and grounds. She had one of the largest oak trees in New York in her front yard, and her flowers and white picket fence were a landmark on Route 79. She and Ora donated fourteen acres around the Six Mile Creek drainage area to the Finger Lakes Land Trust in order that the land's natural beauty be preserved.

Laura Lee Smith—student, scholar, writer, wife and mother, beautifier, disciplinarian, teacher, artist, conservationist. These talents, interests and commitments created a legacy of appreciative alumni at the School and of grateful admirers in the community.

Robert M. Chase, Peter Rainsford, Thomas John Kelly