

John Clarence McCurdy

April 23, 1878 — December 10, 1973

John Clarence McCurdy, professor of agricultural engineering, emeritus, died December 10, 1973, at Oak Hill Manor, Ithaca, at the age of 95. He was born in Mercer County, Pennsylvania, on April 23, 1878.

Clarence McCurdy graduated from Fredonia (Pennsylvania) Preparatory School and then taught school for three years. He then attended Grove City College and graduated with the B.S. degree in 1905. Following this, he served as principal of Vandergrift Heights schools for one year. The next year and for several succeeding summers he was in city engineering work in Grove City, Pennsylvania. In the fall of 1907 he entered the School of Civil Engineering, Cornell University. He was a student instructor in the school and taught in summer surveying camps. He graduated with the Civil Engineering degree in 1912 and did graduate work the following year in sanitary engineering. He was an instructor in civil engineering until 1915.

In September 1915, J. C. McCurdy became an instructor in Rural Engineering (later Agricultural Engineering) in the College of Agriculture at Cornell University. He was promoted to assistant professor in 1916 and to professor in 1923.

During World War I he was employed for three summers by the J. G. White Management Co. for railway evaluation work, and for two summers he was in charge of their engineering work.

Professor McCurdy did some of the early work in agricultural waste management, having done research on the disposal of creamery wastes for the New York State Milk Conference Board.

He was a charter member of the Soil Conservation Society of America and was an engineering adviser to the Soil Conservation Service from 1936 until his retirement in June 1946.

He held a New York State Professional Engineer's and Surveyor's license in the early days of licensing, when few held such licenses. He did considerable private practice, which he continued after his retirement. One job was engineer in charge of foundations for the Plant Science building on the campus.

He has written on sewage disposal and had a College bulletin on the use, construction, and building of septic tanks. He wrote on farm road construction and had a bulletin on the use and making of concrete on the farm.

Professor McCurdy was a good teacher, having taught for thirty-one years. He taught farm engineering, drainage and irrigation, and the use of concrete. His courses were taught with the best engineering ideals and the highest of standards. He instilled in his students the desire to do the job thoroughly and accurately. He was a disciplinarian, but he had a sincere interest in the students and they had a high regard for him. Students often sought him out and asked about him after graduation.

“Mac,” as he was known by his friends and colleagues, was a family man who enjoyed having his children and grandchildren around him. He and his wife, Adda Botts McCurdy, who survives him, celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary in 1969. He is also survived by three daughters, Mrs. Helen Grommon, Mrs. Ruth (M.R.) Shaw, and Mrs. Mary Jaffurs; a son, Colonel Leon McCurdy; a sister, Mrs. Lucille Gibson; fourteen grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren.

He lived in Forest Home, next to the campus, from early in his college life until his death, having spent only a short time in the Oak Hill Manor Nursing home.

A. W. Gibson, E. S. Shepardson