

Herbert Bertsch Hartwig

July 8, 1898 — September 16, 1967

Plants and animals were lifelong interests of Herbert Bertsch Hartwig. Born on a farm in Wayne County, Michigan, he attended Michigan State College, graduating in 1921. In the following year he was a graduate teaching fellow at Iowa State College and received the M.S. degree there. He subsequently earned the Ph.D. degree from Pennsylvania State College in 1939, fulfilling the requirements during leaves and a sabbatic year.

His professional career began in 1923 with appointment as instructor in the College of Agriculture at Syracuse University. He was successively Assistant and Associate Professor there. He came to Cornell in 1927, first as Assistant Extension Professor, and then as Assistant Professor of Field Crops. In 1937, he was appointed Professor of Field Crops and served until retiring as Professor of Agronomy, Emeritus, June 30, 1966.

Professor Hartwig's first appointment at Cornell combined extension responsibilities with studies of field crops. During this period he wrote half a dozen extension bulletins, over 100 articles for Farm Bureau News, and others for the farm press. His subsequent research and observations led to four memoirs and technical articles, and two widely used illustrated teaching manuals on grasses and legumes.

But Professor Hartwig's great love was teaching. For him teaching was an accomplishment, a career, a passion, and he gave it his full energies, sternly disciplined through periods of ill health. Bliss Perry's autobiography title, from Chaucer, "And Gladly Teach," is likewise an apt summation of Herbert Hartwig's career at Cornell. Probably more than 3,000 students passed through his formal courses. All were exposed to vigorous, superbly well-organized lectures, and to laboratory work founded on close study of a great wealth of plant material. Each year saw revised lecture notes, new visual aids, new stores of live and dried plants, and pungent comments on both current fads and outmoded notions. He taught as an inspired schoolmaster, with scant patience and no sympathy for the dilettante or idler, however clever. His students learned plant morphology, physiology and ecology in a new context, but additionally they were stamped by an unequivocal philosophy of what the world and Professor Hartwig expected of them. Both influences are mentioned repeatedly in a volume of memorial letters from former students, presented upon his retirement. A surprising number of students from all backgrounds found a first realization of their role in a technological society through his firm conviction that rational applications must be based on scientific knowledge of plants and methods, but that such knowledge was profitless until utilized.

It is pleasant to recall that his stern fondness was recognized by his current students as well as alumni. Painted slogans on the sidewalk and a banner renaming Caldwell Hall as “Hartwig Hall” greeted him on the day of his last lecture before retirement, and the lecture ended with a prolonged ovation.

The interest in poultry which he had acquired as a farm boy remained as a hobby throughout his life. He was well informed in the practical and technical phases of the poultry industry and rarely missed any on-campus conference pertaining to this subject. One of his proudest possessions was a collection of old and current books dealing with poultry. Immediately upon retirement he set to work to develop a small poultry farm where he might put some of his theories to the test. He had made only a beginning in this new career when his last illness occurred.

J. H. Bruckner, Stanley W. Warren, Earl L. Stone