

James Edward Rice

March 12, 1865 — October 25, 1953

After a long and eventful life, James Edward Rice, Emeritus Professor of Poultry Husbandry, died in Miami, Florida, on October 25, 1953. He and Mrs. Rice had made their home in Miami for a number of years. He had been ill for some time and for the last five years had been blind. Interment was at Grove Cemetery, Trumansburg, New York, near the farm which he operated with the help of his sons, when still Professor and Head of the Poultry Department at Cornell.

Professor Rice was farm reared and possessed in great abundance the sturdiness and character traditionally associated with a man of the soil. He was born at Aurora, Illinois, March 12, 1865. Both parents and foster parents died before he was fifteen. His father lost his business in the Chicago fire of 1871. His sense of honesty forbade him to take the name of the family which adopted him and his sister, so he lost an opportunity to become their heir.

He also defied his aunts and uncles who wished that he might become a doctor like his grandfather and who would have financed his education. Instead he followed the wishes of his father who urged him to go to Cornell University and become an "educated farmer." It was necessary for him to earn all his expenses while in college.

His personal qualities of persistence, enthusiasm, leadership, and determination showed up early in his career during his attendance at Granville Military Academy and while in the officer-training unit at Cornell, where he earned virtually every honor attainable. Only his love for agriculture gained as a child and youth and the inspiration of articles he had read wooed him away from a regular Army appointment.

After graduation in 1890, Professor Rice remained at Cornell for a year as graduate assistant to Professor Isaac P. Roberts, teaching the first formal course in poultry husbandry to be offered.

The urge to carry on in the business of farming called him back to the land, and for eleven years he farmed in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Westchester County, New York. He took time out during this period to spread the gospel about scientific poultry raising, delivering 1134 talks at farm institutes in four states. He became head of the Cornell Experimenters' League. Then when Liberty Hyde Bailey was made Dean of the College of Agriculture at Cornell in 1903, he asked Rice to join him as assistant professor of poultry husbandry. This was one of the most fateful business decisions Professor Rice ever made. He became professor and head of the department in 1907 and continued at that post until his retirement June 30, 1934. The poultry building named Rice Hall in 1940, and

the recently established Rice Memorial Library in the Albert R. Mann Library of the College of Agriculture are monuments to his memory. He was the first professor of poultry husbandry in America and probably in the world. An oil portrait placed in Rice Hall by friends and former students does him honor, as does a bronze bust, the gift of Mrs. Rice.

Professor Rice's achievements were many. He organized the first poultry judging school in the United States in 1918, and the first poultry show, emphasizing production qualities in 1922; served as the first institute lecturer on poultry husbandry and started the first poultry extension work. He edited the Poultry Science series of text-books and was coauthor of two poultry books, Judging Poultry for Production, and Practical Poultry Management.

He was one of the founders of the Poultry Science Association, serving one term as its president, and of the World's Poultry Science Association, and was a life member of both. He served as chairman of the 7th World's Poultry Congress, in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1938, and was president of the World's Poultry Science Association from 1939 to 1948. One of the peaks in his long and distinguished career came in 1948 when he presided as president of the World's Poultry Science Association at the 8th World's Poultry Congress, in Copenhagen, Denmark. At the meeting in Denmark he was made an Honorary Past President of the Association. He attended six of the World's Poultry Congresses (Holland, Canada, England, Germany, United States, and Denmark) and his contacts were so wide that he became the best known poultryman in the world. He was a founder of the Northeastern Poultry Producer's Council and served one term as its president.

It is impossible to measure or even grasp the wide influence of Professor Rice. Twenty-eight of his students became heads of poultry departments in the United States, Canada and other lands. Many others have become teachers in high schools and colleges, research workers, practical poultry farmers and commercial operators in the rapidly expanding poultry industry. Research that Professor Rice and his colleagues began in the nutrition and health of the lowly hen has not only made the chicken the most scientifically fed animal we have today but the fundamental knowledge gained has aided materially in improving human nutrition and health.

Youth always held an important place in the thinking and activities of Professor Rice. He early fostered club work for boys and girls which later developed into 4-H Club work. Locally and nationally he devoted much time to the Boy Scout movement. He served on the National Council and was primarily responsible for the establishment of a fine camp in his own district.

Student groups held his interest. Because of his enthusiasm for youth he established at Cornell several debate stages, speaking contests for university students. He played an important part in establishing Ho-Nun-De-Kah, an honorary society for students in the College of Agriculture at Cornell and for many years entertained the group with a chicken barbecue on his beloved “Egg and Apple Farm,” near Trumansburg.

Professor Rice’s long life was marred by two personal tragedies—the loss of his first wife, Elsie Van Buren Rice, in 1926, after 28 years of married life, and the untimely death of his eldest son at the age of 46. He married Louise E. Dawley, a lifelong friend in 1936, who was a most helpful and loving companion. Professor Rice is survived by Mrs. Rice, two sons, John V. B., and James E., Jr., both of Trumansburg, New York; and three daughters, Mrs. Alice Paddock, Gettysburg, Pa; Mrs. Ruth McMillan, Ithaca, N. Y.; and Mrs. Cyrus W. Riley, Oakland, California, and 15 grandchildren.

To describe Professor Rice fully—that is impossible. One of his former students said, “His character is made up of all the little incidents, like sparks from an emory wheel, that constitute his life.” Another said, “It’s his contagious vision.” A third said, “It’s in his every expression—in his sparkling eyes,” and a fourth said, “It’s his faith, ability, energy, enthusiasm and great and lovable personality; qualities of a pioneer and leader.”

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