

William Arthur Rawlins

December 5, 1908 – December 31, 2007

Art Rawlins, Professor of Entomology, Emeritus, died at Memorial Mission Hospital, Asheville, North Carolina, at age 99. Art was blessed with longevity and was active almost to the end,

The factors of time and place were positive influences in his life. He was the son of Thomas Henry and Elizabeth Rawlins. His father had immigrated to the United States from England, being drawn to the abundance of its agricultural land.

Art's childhood was spent on the Darrow farm, just outside the city limits of Geneva, New York, located on the northern shore of Seneca Lake, the largest of the Finger Lakes. Geneva was a sedate town. Its South Main Street, lined on both sides with picturesque American Elms, was the elegant place to live. The city's cultural atmosphere was strongly influenced by the two liberal arts colleges, and the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station.

The Experiment Station was initially independent of the State educational system. In 1923, it was placed under administrative jurisdiction of the Agricultural College in Ithaca, fifty miles distance on Cayuga Lake. In 1940, the professional staff at Geneva was given faculty status in the College of Agriculture. Thus began the Geneva staff's long climb to parity with the Ithaca faculty.

Art's early schooling was in the one-room local schoolhouse. Discipline was strict with punishment; a note to parents usually provoked additional punishment. Art's home life followed the well-established pattern of life on the family farm, industriousness, honest toil, and faith in Agriculture as the basis for a strong independent Society.

Teenage boys were expected to supplement farm labor with an outside job. This gave Art an entrée to the staff of the Experiment Station to whom he delivered fresh eggs. This contact led to employment in the Entomology Department. His next step on the educational ladder was enrollment in the College of Agriculture at Cornell University. After earning his Bachelor of Science degree in 1930, and the Ph.D. degree in 1936, he joined the faculty of the Department of Entomology, as a specialist in economic entomology, biological, chemical and cultural control of insect pests of potatoes, carrots, lettuce, and onions. To add to

his duties, he taught courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. During his career as a faculty member, he supervised the graduate training of over 40 students.

Art's tutorial style was unique, largely collegial, bearing out his philosophy that Cornell's entomology program attracted able, highly motivated students. His primary objective as a mentor was to create an atmosphere of learning. His unobtrusive leadership encouraged a congenial setting where fellow graduate students would share in the learning quest.

Post World War II ushered in an era of assistance to third world countries. Cornell had become a leader in International Agriculture. Art's growing reputation and his humanitarian inclinations drew him to these opportunities. This was facilitated by his students having established themselves in Aid programs and welcomed collaboration with their mentor. The institutions that arose were the United Nations, Food and Agriculture and World Health Organizations, World Bank and foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller.

After retirement from academic life, he and his wife, Alma, traveled widely at home and abroad. In 1986, they moved to Highland Farms Retirement Community, Black Mountain in western North Carolina. This congenial setting saw them volunteering to assist newly made friends and neighbors.

Never having lost his devotion to gardening and sharing its abundant harvest of flowers and vegetables with friends, Art epitomized the spirit of generosity and excellence.

His beloved wife, son Stephen and daughter Elizabeth predeceased Art. His daughter, Phyllis Sherman, and three grandchildren survive him. It was a source of great pride to Art that the family established a thriving Roadside Market of high quality produce on the fertile soils of Conway, New Hampshire.

In reflecting on Art's life in retrospect, we cite the conventional wisdom of an earlier age, wisdom dear to his heart:

“...whosoever could make...two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to the country than the whole race of politicians put together.”

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)
Gulliver's Travels, 1726

Edward H. Smith, Chairperson; James E. Dewey, Arthur A. Muka