

Jacob Herbert Bruckner

May 14, 1905 — February 26, 1970

J. Herbert Bruckner was born in Anaconda, Montana. From an early age he was interested in poultry. He owned and managed a poultry farm from twelve years of age until 1923, when he was graduated from Anaconda High School. He obtained the B.S. degree from Purdue University with a major in poultry husbandry, and the Ph.D. from Cornell University with a major in poultry breeding and minors in genetics and marketing. Throughout his forty years at Cornell University, Herb Bruckner did much to change the production of poultry from a “husbandry” to a science.

He married Frances McKibben in 1930. They had four sons, Bruce, Allan, Dean and Keith. He spoke often of his family and was proud of their achievements. He particularly enjoyed his eleven grandchildren.

Herb Bruckner loved Cornell University and had the highest devotion to its ideals and aims. Few are better versed in the history of Cornell than he was, and no one has been a greater supporter of the Cornell tradition of freedom and responsibility.

As head of the Department of Poultry Science for twenty-five years, Herbert Bruckner recognized that to serve the needs of both agriculture and Cornell it was necessary to staff his department with scientists capable of conducting the basic research needed to find the answers to problems of the poultry industry and, at the same time, with capabilities to teach and lead undergraduate and graduate students in these basic areas of research. Herb Bruckner saw his job as one of service to those in his department. He took a personal interest in the progress, accomplishments and tragedies of each faculty member and each student in his department. He did everything possible to provide his staff with the facilities and finances necessary to carry on the research and teaching that they wished to do. He shouldered numerous onerous tasks and responsibilities which could have been delegated to others.

He continued to follow the progress of each student who left Cornell. He published a newsletter periodically, which was sent to over two hundred alumni of the department.

He liked books, particularly old books about poultry. He did much to make the Rice Library at Cornell the best collection of poultry books in the world.

He was a much loved department head. In 1965, when he left the headship, the faculty of the department unanimously voted to ask the Board of Trustees to name the new poultry laboratory building the Bruckner Laboratory of Poultry Biology. The trustees agreed to bestow this rare honor on an active faculty member in 1966. Bruck's reaction upon reading the letter from the Board of Trustees typified his humble modesty. He read the letter, became rather embarrassed, and muttered something about how other members of his staff deserved the honor far more than he. This was characteristic. He was not one to seek honors. Naturally he was proud to be recognized and it touched him more than he would ever admit.

Herb was straightforward and unpretentious. He was comfortable to be with, whether you were a student meeting the head of the department for the first time, a poultry farmer, or a colleague, you could be comfortable with Herb. You could enjoy talking with him and could appreciate his sense of humor.

Herb Bruckner was an able departmental administrator. But his concern for the University extended beyond his own department. He was a member of the General Committee of the Graduate School, and he was on the selection committees for the dean of the College of Agriculture and the dean of the Graduate School; he played a crucial role on the Corson Committee that recommended the establishment of the Division of Biological Sciences. His most recent assignment was as a member of the Committee on Faculty Governance.

Herb tackled each assignment with enthusiasm, sincerity, and above all with wise objectivity. Thus one of his greatest contributions to Cornell lay in his constant challenging of the status quo, and his exhortation to reexamine academic programs. It was Herb Bruckner in the late 1950s who prodded the faculty and the administration of the College of Agriculture into a review of its entire academic program. This undertaking resulted in a recognition of the need for frequent reappraisals which has continued for over a decade.

Many of us will always cherish our informal discussions with Herb Bruckner. They never dealt with trivia but quickly centered on how this University could be improved and strengthened. He was a champion of change and he recognized that the young would have to provide much of the thrust for change; therefore, he also was a champion of the young. Herb Bruckner was not just a teacher, not just a colleague, not just an administrator—he was a good friend to all who knew him.

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