

Robert C. Lamb

May 11, 1919 — March 31, 1997

Dr. Robert C. Lamb, Emeritus Professor in Cornell University's Department of Horticultural Sciences at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, New York, died at his home following a serious illness due to a breathing disorder.

Dr. Lamb was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He was awarded a B.S. degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 1941. After serving in Europe as a Captain in the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps from 1941-45, he received his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Minnesota in 1947 and 1954, respectively. He became a naturalized citizen of the U.S.A. in June 1952.

Bob joined the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in 1948. A description of his duties at the onset of his career reads: "Leader of projects to produce improved varieties of peaches, nectarines, apricots, cherries, and pears for New York State conditions. He also directs the work of breeding new varieties of apples and pears resistant to fire blight, scab, and other destructive diseases. He will be expected to continue and expand this work in the future"— which he did with international award winning success.

In 1988, Bob received the Wilder Medal from the American Pomological Society for his fruit breeding research and in recognition of his two-term presidency of this professional society (1981 and 1982). The award recognized his work in variety development and highlighted the development of the scab resistant apple cultivars 'Liberty' and 'Freedom'; his introduction of two hardy peaches, 'Brighton' and 'Eden'; the nectarine varieties 'New Yorker' and 'Morton'; the high quality pears 'Aurora' and 'Highland'; and the apricot varieties 'Farmingdale' and 'Alfred'.

Bob joined plant collection expeditions to Nepal and Romania seeking peach, apricot, and plum cultivars for use in breeding. He lectured at international fruit breeding conferences in Eastern Europe and was principal advisor to fruit breeding graduate students who are now leading their country's apple breeding. The 'Liberty' apple that Dr. Lamb collaboratively developed with his Station pathologist colleagues has steadily progressed to a place of commercial merit, especially for orchardists seeking new options for reduced pesticide production.

Bob retired from Cornell University in 1988 but continued to devote considerable time to the Geneva Experiment Station activities. He kept office hours where he assisted with fruit breeding research such as fresh and processed fruit quality evaluations. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the New York State Fruit Testing Cooperative

Association, a Geneva Experiment Station based fruit nursery for variety testing of new and noteworthy fruit introductions from the Geneva programs. He assisted in creating trials throughout New York orchards to evaluate the potential of advanced selections and new varieties to meet the commercial needs of New York growers.

Bob was a member of the Sigma Xi Scientific Society, the American Society for Horticultural Science, the Canadian Horticultural Society, and the American Pomological Society. In addition to his work at the Geneva Station, Dr. Lamb was active in community affairs. He was a member of the Seneca Lake Yacht Club, the Geneva Historical Society, and diligently served on the Troop Committee of Boy Scout Troop #4, sponsored by the Presbyterian Church in Geneva, where he was a Ruling Elder and headed many church committees.

Bob is survived by his wife, Barbara; three children: David S. Lamb, of Spokane, Washington, Elizabeth M. Lamb, of Fayetteville, Arkansas, and William A. Lamb, of Newark, New York; two grandsons, Christopher Robert, of Spokane, and Robert John, of Newark; and his brother, Thomas W. Lamb, of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Dr. Lamb's legacy of breeding disease resistant varieties of apples, cold hardy apricots and peaches, and delicious pears has benefited the New York fruit industry and consumers. This year a national review of Cornell's plant breeding program acknowledged Dr. Lamb's research and the contributions he has made to breeding pears that are resistant to the pear psylla, a pest of pear orchards in New York and world-wide. He left a wealth of germplasm in his breeding collections, many of which have the potential to be released as improved cultivars. He pursued challenging long term research such as examining resistance in apple to powdery mildew and fire blight. This work required close cooperation with plant pathologists and the patience and persistence to use wild species in strategies that required several generations of breeding and rigorous selection for multigenic traits.

Bob Lamb's legacy extends far beyond his professional career. He was dedicated to his research, and had an enthusiasm that was contagious to students, visiting scientists and to his colleagues. His kindness was one attribute that benefited all that interacted with him. Students and faculty were made to feel like family within a short time of visiting the Lamb household, and Bob and Barbara were considered "local" grandparents by several children of the Geneva Experiment Station faculty. His positive attitude and good humor never wavered, even in illness. Bob's hearty laugh, warm smile, and the twinkle in his eye will long be remembered by all who were fortunate enough to know him.

Robert Andersen, Michael Dickson, Susan Brown