

Bristow Adams

November 11, 1875 — November 19, 1957

After an illness of nearly a year, Bristow Adams, Emeritus Professor in Extension Teaching and Editor for the Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics, died November 19, 1957, at Ithaca, New York. Thus he ended a long and full life, for more than half of which he served Cornell University.

Professor Adams was born in Washington, D. C, November 11, 1875. He attended Washington Central High School and having early shown marked artistic ability, he studied at the Spring Garden Institute in Philadelphia and the Corcoran Art School in Washington. He later enrolled at Stanford University, graduating in 1900 with the A.B. degree.

Talents for both journalism and art found expression early in the life of Professor Adams. In 1892, at the age of seventeen, he was co-founder of the Pathfinder magazine and its associate editor until 1896. Following his freshman year at Stanford in 1897, he was appointed artist for Bering Sea Fur Seal Commission. The official report carried illustrations based on life sketches which he made on the Pribilof Islands. Also, while at Stanford, he founded the Chaparrel, the College humor magazine.

On his return to Washington in 1902, Professor Adams was engaged in a number of editorial activities. He was co-founder, and from 1903 to 1905, managing editor of Washington Life; he was editor of American Spectator 1905—1906; and at the same time, from 1902 to 1906, he was associate editor of Forestry and Irrigation, a position which brought him into close association with the Forest Service of U. S. Department of Agriculture and its leader Gifford Pinchot. This awakened his life-long interest in forestry and conservation.

In 1906 he joined the Forest Service as Forest Assistant and was soon promoted to Forest Examiner. His time was divided between field work, which included inspection of National Forests and the direction of fire fighters, and editorial duties under the direction of Dr. Herbert A. Smith. Adams was later put in charge of the office of information.

Adams came to Cornell University in November 1914 to be in charge of publications and information in the College of Agriculture, taking over the work in that field which had hitherto been handled as a part-time task in the Office of the Secretary. Here he started the mimeographed news service and changed the dress of the Extension Publications and Experiment Stations bulletins to make them more attractive. During the succeeding

thirty years, Cornell won more awards for excellence of output in the printed word than were awarded to any other Land Grant College.

The College was fortunate indeed in that its first full-time editor and head of information services should be a person with Adams' broad training, experience, and talents.

One of his first contributions to the profession was to establish the agricultural editor as a "service man." His philosophy of how an agricultural college editor can best serve his institution was best expressed in his own words at the annual meeting of the American Association of Agricultural College Editors at Wisconsin in 1915. Here he said, "The best form of publicity in connection with extension work is that which is farthest from the generally accepted use of that word. Truth which will aid the reader carries its own validity." It is more than a coincidence that the third resolution of that meeting reads: "BE IT RESOLVED that this Association recommend that the words 'information service' be substituted for the word 'publicity'."

Professor Adams established courses in journalism at the College of Agriculture which at the time of his retirement numbered 13 credit hours toward agricultural electives. Although the primary purpose of these courses is to help train extension workers, many of his former students have made outstanding careers of journalism and related fields. He also taught a two-hour course in Conservation of Natural Resources. In 1930 he taught a similar course at the University of Hawaii on invitation from that University.

Because of his interest in student enterprises outside of the class room, he was a member of the board of directors of the Cornell Daily Sun, unofficial adviser of the Cornell Countryman, and member of the Board of Managers of Willard Straight Hall. Also, for twenty-five years, he was faculty advisor for track athletics.

Adams traveled extensively, observing agricultural practices in many countries. He visited England in 1924 and continental Europe in 1926. In 1930 he traveled around the world north of the equator; again he went around the world south of the equator in 1937-38. Through many public addresses, he shared the experiences of these trips with students and colleagues on the campus and with both urban and rural audiences throughout New York State. He also gave a series of monthly radio talks under the title of "The World and Us" from radio Station WGY at Schenectady. Another regular radio activity was his weekly book review called "Let's Read a Book" from the Cornell Radio Station.

During his last year in active service, he was made a member of the administrative committee of the Cornell Plantations and editor of its quarterly publication of the same name. He continued in both of these capacities from the time of his retirement in 1945 until his last illness.

Adams was a member of the following professional and fraternal organizations: National Press Club, Washington, D. C, Society of American Foresters (Secretary, 1913); New York Press Association (life member and director-at-large); Sigma Delta Chi, professional journalism society (National honorary president, 1920) ; American Association of Agricultural College Editors, (president, 1921) ; American Association of Teachers of Journalism; Sigma Xi; Alpha Gamma Rho; Epsilon Sigma Phi (Chief, 1939) ; Savage Club of Ithaca.

While outstanding for his national leadership in college editorial and information services, Bristow Adams, or “BA” as he was universally known, will best be remembered for his teaching and counseling of students. The Monday night receptions which he and Mrs. Adams held for more than thirty years are treasured memories of many generations of Cornell students. His door was always open to students and colleagues alike. To share his wisdom and human understanding was always a profit and a delight.

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