

Alfred M. S. Pridham

August 12, 1902 — April 20, 1978

Alfred Melville Stewart Pridham, Ph.D., professor emeritus, Cornell University, was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1902, the only child of William Stewart Pridham and Emma Charlotte Geddes Pridham. He died April 20, 1978, in his seventy-sixth year.

Professor Pridham did his baccalaureate studies at the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph, since renamed Guelph University. In 1925 he came to Cornell University for graduate studies and served as an instructor in ornamental horticulture while completing both his Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Thereafter, he was appointed to the faculty and devoted the whole of his career to the study and teaching of ornamental horticulture at Cornell University and throughout New York State. He retired in 1967, having completed forty-two years in continuous service to the University. In that year, the Board of Trustees of the University appointed him professor emeritus.

But one cannot characterize this life with so simple a chronology. His contributions through the years have left an indelible mark on his colleagues and students in ways both personal and professional. Prid, as he was generally known, was vitally interested in students and especially in his advisees. And they in turn respected him. The respect he generated in his students was not drawn from his mastery of registration technicalities, but rather, it grew from his genuine and complete concern for each student as an individual. This concern convinced each of them that they had a real friend and an advocate in their adviser.

Several weeks before his death Prid received a letter from one of his students stating that he had heard he was not well and sending his best wishes. He also thanked him for the profound influence he had had on his life. The student, one of Prid's advisees in the 1950s, now owns and manages a substantial horticultural business in a nearby state. And so it was that as his department colleagues traveled, Prid's former students would ever inquire of them concerning their old friend and mentor.

Prid's empathy for others extended well beyond his students. Nurserymen, faculty colleagues, researchers, administrators, neighbors—Prid took time to be pleasant, helpful, cooperative, involved, and understanding. He was known throughout the University and the state.

Al Pridham, an understanding and dedicated teacher and adviser, also made his mark in horticultural research and extension teaching. From his early work in the 1920s and 1930s with classification of gladiolus varieties and the culture of garden perennials, through his major efforts in nursery crop propagation and management, and in post-World War II years, nursery weed control, Prid was ever in the forefront of the horticultural industries' needs. He moved among nurserymen freely and frequently. He saw at first hand their needs, and he interpreted these needs into research Projects, usually with some of the plots directly on their nurseries. From this research he gleaned the necessary new knowledge that he extended to his industry colleagues.

Of one thing there can be no doubt—Prid was a great horticulturist. He knew plants, and he knew their anatomy, physiology, and practical culture. His contributions of knowledge to the nursery industry and to the horticultural profession drew wide recognition. The *Proceedings of the Northeast Weed Science Society* contain more than fifty articles by Dr. Pridham on defoliant for nursery stock and on weed control in ornamentals and nursery crops. The pages of the *Proceedings of the American Society for Horticultural Science*, *American Nurseryman* magazine, and other horticultural publications contain literally hundreds of his contributions.

Numerous honors came to him in recognition and gratitude from numerous organizations, professional societies, horticultural firms, and students. Among these honors were the Norman J. Colman Award of the American Association of Nurserymen in 1952 for research in nursery work (he was one of only about twenty persons to be so recognized), the certificate of meritorious service of the New York State Arborists' Association in 1955, the Hall of Fame Award of the New York State Nurserymen's Association in 1960 (one of the first group of recipients of the award), the Epsilon Sigma "hi Award of Merit given by his extension colleagues to a devoted extension specialist in 1965, and New York State Arborists' Association life membership in 1967. He also received the highest awards from the New York State chapter of the Men's Garden Club of America and an honorary life membership in the National Shade Tree Conference, now renamed the International Arboriculture Society. He was cited for his work by both the American Horticultural Society and the International Horticulture Congress. In 1969 he was elected a fellow of the American Society for Horticultural Science. Upon his retirement, the New York State Nurserymen's Association established the A. M. S. Pridham Scholarship in the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University, and the New York State Arborists' Association planted a black oak tree on the Cornell University campus in his honor and named their association scholarship fund the Alfred M. S. Pridham Scholarship Fund.

Prid did not look forward to retirement—indeed, he did not enjoy it. But he continued to have concern for others. When physical infirmities required that Al and Alice take up residence in Ithacare, our innovative senior residence, Prid became involved, serving on the Residents' Council and ultimately being elected its vice president. He took considerable interest in Ithacare's grounds management and served as resident horticulturist. During this same time he took an active interest in the newly installed Stewart Park rose garden, dedicated to his good friend, the late Arthur Stallman. Voluntarily he cared for the garden and spent many hours trimming, spraying, weeding, and advising on the care of the roses. He wrote articles about the garden and its development for the newsletters of several rose societies. Annually, he wrote to Mrs. Stallman to give her an enthusiastic progress report.

Upon hearing these remarks about Professor Pridham, the teacher, researcher, horticulturist, one who did not know him might envision him as simply another serious academic. Those of us who knew him well know better. Each of us could easily recount one or more happenings perpetrated by or involving Prid that brought forth smiles, indeed, robust laughter. There were the Pridhamisms, as witty comments came to be known with much affection, for example, "You can tell a dogwood by its bark!" And there are a legion of stories, usually told by former students and colleagues, about Prid's driving; these are invariably told with the mixed emotions of remembered panic and retrospective humor. And there are the mystery beech trees that appeared in the south lawn of Plant Science Building, much to the amazement of the buildings and grounds staff. And there is that rare botanical and automotive hybrid indigenous only to Ithaca but known worldwide as *Pridham dentatum*. The story is probably true that once Prid drove a fleet car to the Syracuse airport and then flew off to a conference somewhere or other, only to return by air several days later directly to Ithaca, leaving the Fleet Garage staff to ponder the whereabouts of their fleet car. Yes, Prid earned yet another distinction in his lifetime—that of the classic absent-minded professor.

And so we pay a final tribute to our colleague, teacher, friend, Cornellian—Alfred Melville Stewart Pridham.

Arthur Bing, George L. Good, Carl F. Gortzig