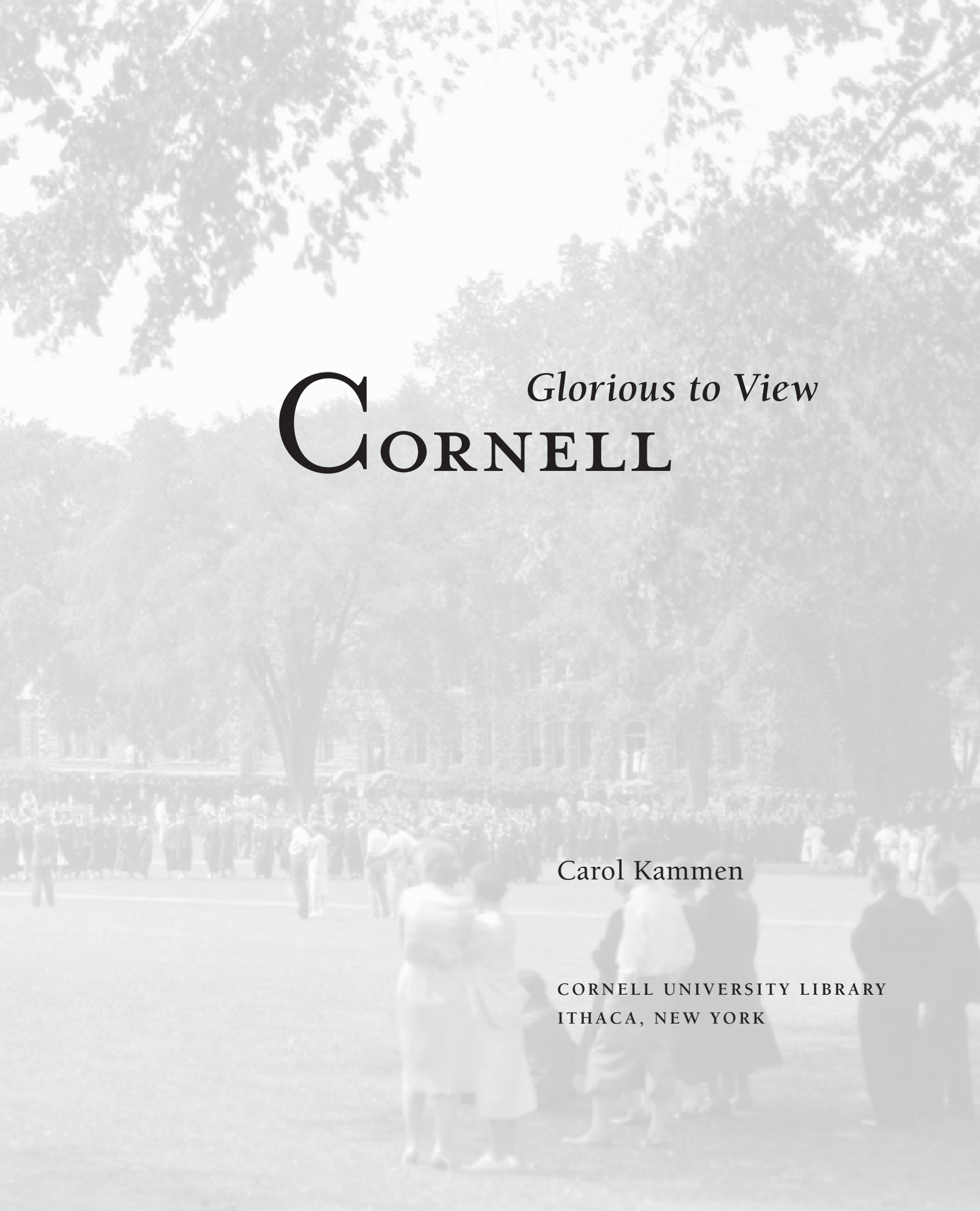
Cornell



Cornell *Glorious to View*

Carol Kammen

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First edition
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2003111767
ISBN: 0-935995-03-X

Images: from Rare and Manuscript Collections, Kroch Library, Cornell University; from Dale Corson; and from the author
Frontispiece: Commencement, ca. 1928

Photo editor: Susette Newberry
Design: John Hubbard
Produced by: Marquand Books, Inc., Seattle
www.marquand.com
Printed and bound by C&C Offset Printing Co., Ltd., Hong Kong

For my Cornellians

Daniel Merson Kammen ’84
Douglas Anton Kammen ’89 and ’96

And for Michael, who since 1965 has taught history at Cornell

ALMA MATER

Far above Cayuga's waters,
With its waves of blue,
Stands our noble Alma Mater,
Glorious to view.

Far above the busy humming
Of the bustling town,
Reared against the arch of heaven,
Looks she proudly down.

Sentry like o'er lake and valley
Towers her regal form,
Watch and ward forever keeping,
Braving time and storm.

So through clouds of doubt and darkness
Gleams her beacon light,
Fault and error clear revealing,
Blazing forth the right.

To the glory of her founder
Rise her stately walls.
May her sons pay equal tribute
Whene'er duty calls.

When the moments, swiftly fleeting,
Ages roll between,
Many yet unborn shall hail her:
Alma Mater, Queen.

In the music of the waters
As they glide along,
In the murmur of the breezes
With their whispered song,

In the tuneful chorus blending,
With each pealing bell,
One refrain seems oft repeated:
Hail, all hail, Cornell!

Here, by flood and foaming torrent,
Gorge and rocky dell,
Pledge we faith and homage ever
To our loved Cornell.

May time ne'er efface the memory
Of her natal day
And her name and fame be honored
Far and wide away!

Lift the chorus, speed it onward,
Loud her praises tell,
Hail to thee, our Alma Mater.
Hail, all hail, Cornell.

—Archibald Croswell Weeks '74 and
Wilmot Moses Smith '74, 1872

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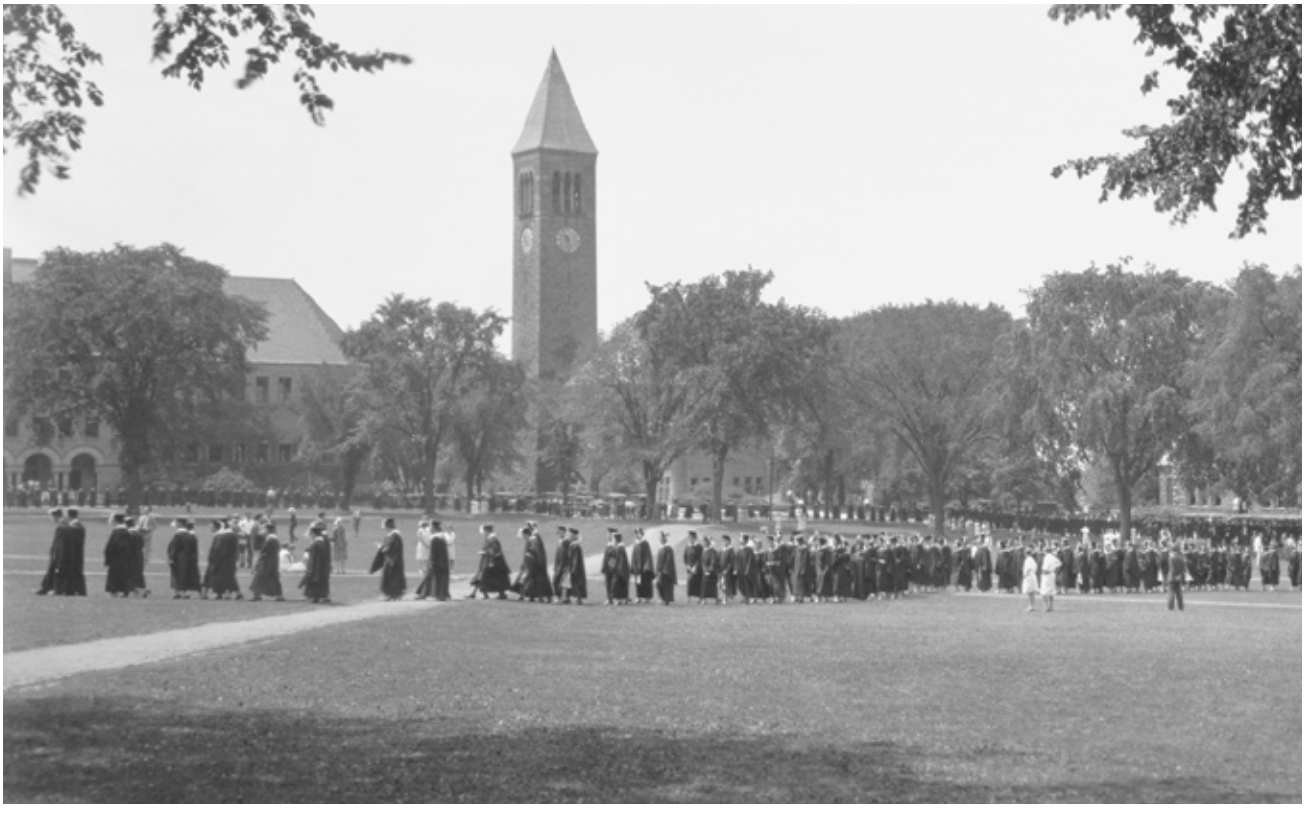
FOUNDER & FACULTY OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY, Photographed by PURDY AND FREAR ITHACA N.Y.

Preamble

I FIRST BECAME INTERESTED IN THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY Archives in the early 1980s through a story in the *Cornell Alumni News*. An interest in Cornell's photographic history soon led to my meeting with Gould Colman, University Archivist; Tom Hickerson, then Chairman of the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives; and Dale Corson, Cornell President Emeritus. We shared a common belief that knowledge of the riches of the university's history was vital for Cornell students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Although Morris Bishop's *History of Cornell* is outstanding and treasured by all, it carries Cornell's history only to the early 1950s. Since this coincided with my own graduation from Cornell, in 1951, I knew well that much had happened at Cornell since then, and that the Cornell University Archives had continued to add valuable, exciting documents, even for the earlier period.

Dale Corson convinced me that I should join him and Cornell Trustee Robert Purcell in supporting archival arrangement and indexing of the papers of recent Cornell presidents, a project that would support the writing of a new history. With this goal in mind, I continued to work closely with the staff of the Archives, including the new University Archivist, Elaine Engst. Through my frequent visits to the library, I became ever more enthusiastic about bringing the Cornell story up to the twenty-first century. Cornell Presidents Dale Corson, Frank Rhodes, and Hunter Rawlings all provided necessary encouragement.

Creating a new history of Cornell has, not surprisingly, proven to be a complex task. That it is finished today has required the talents and dedication of numerous people. Without the enthusiasm of my friends in the University Archives and the support of University Librarians Sarah Thomas and Alain Seznec, this endeavor could have never reached completion. Through Tom and Elaine, I met Carol Kammen, the ideal person to author this work. Carol had been writing books, articles, and newspaper columns about Cornell and the Ithaca region for many years. Additionally, she teaches an undergraduate course on Cornell's history that has generated a spirit of excitement about Cornell among her students. Now she has completed a work that will extend knowledge of this unique history to generations of Cornellians to come. Carol's wonderful work opens with an eloquent foreword from Professor Walter LaFeber, one of Cornell's great historians, and includes brief reflections by Dale Corson, Frank Rhodes, and Hunter Rawlings.



Commencement, ca. 1928.

Cornell is so in my blood because my father, Sidney G. Kay, was class of 1922; I was class of 1951; and I have two sons who are Cornellians: my eldest, L. William Kay, III, is from the class of 1974, and my youngest, Henrik L. Werring, from the class of 1991. My wife Brit and all of my children have generously shared, and sometimes graciously endured, my devotion to Cornell and pleasure in my many associations there.

The publication of *Cornell: Glorious to View* coincides with the inauguration of Jeffrey Lehman as Cornell's eleventh president. It is a fitting time to look back to Cornell's origins in the nineteenth century, to reflect on the challenges and achievements of the twentieth, and to look forward to its future in the twenty-first.

L. William Kay, II
October 2003

Foreword

ALTHOUGH THE UNITED STATES, BORN IN 1776, WAS ONE OF the youngest of countries, its stunning economic development, social pluralism, and political reform made it the first twentieth-century nation. Much the same can be said of Cornell University. It is among the youngest of the world's major universities. As this superb book succinctly reveals, however, Cornell's physical development, openness to cutting-edge research and teaching, and institutionalization of pioneering educational reforms marked it as an initial twentieth-century, and now twenty-first-century, university.

This history is even more astonishing given Cornell's upstate New York location, where isolation is matched by magnificent scenery (which has the cultural equivalent, we learn from one essayist with tongue firmly in cheek, of "five full professors"). Such isolation has, however, been made to work to the university's advantage. For Cornell is not only a campus but, because of its location, a compressed academic hothouse in which the community's students, faculty, and administration necessarily interact to germinate ideas that have shaped world affairs while also shaping and reshaping the relationships within the community itself. The remarkable commitment and generosity of Cornell alumni, who consistently rank at or near the nation's top in terms of both dollar contributions and personal participation in the university's myriad activities, no doubt come in part from the memories of having lived in, and intellectually prospered from, that unique academic hothouse.

In the mid-1990s, the spouse of a Cornell alumnus making her first visit to Ithaca was awed by traveling for miles through rural, Appalachian countryside and then, as she phrased it, "suddenly encountering an Athens," complete with hills, surrounding villages bearing Greek names, and a roaring local democracy. Her remark in part echoed that of the university's third president, Jacob Gould Schurman: Cornell combined "the idealism of ancient Athens with the industrialism of modern America."

When Ezra Cornell uttered his famous claim that he would found an institution where any person could study any subject, both parts of his claim were revolutionary. In 1865 mostly white males inhabited college classrooms, where they largely studied required courses in ancient languages, the humanities, and some basic science. Equally revolutionary was the belief of Cornell, Schurman, and especially the cofounder, Andrew Dickson White, that Athenian humanism and modern

American industrial science and technology did not divide into two cultures, but instead formed two sides of a single mission that aimed to create a nation whose society would be more open and equal as its economy provided ever-greater material benefits.

The history of Cornell, as of increasing parts of the world, has been largely the struggle to keep those two sides in balance, even as industrial and scientific change resembled an out-of-control kaleidoscope. Some of the university's most dangerous moments arose in the 1870s to 1880s, and more recently during the 1950s to 1980s, when it remained committed to upholding the founders' principles in a violently changing world that sometimes tried to destroy openness and pluralism. In the earlier era, one of intense Protestant religious evangelicalism, White and his successors insisted that Cornell be a nonsectarian institution open to those of all religious faiths. In the later era, Cornell's officials successfully protected the faculty against McCarthyism. Not every American university, unfortunately, could claim such success.

The informal motto of Cornell has been "freedom and responsibility," the phrase offered by the distinguished historian, Carl Becker, on the university's seventy-fifth birthday. But in truth, as Carol Kammen's work reveals, a great university's freedom is actually restricted by its responsibilities. And that is where the major tension arises. Being in the world but not wholly of it has been an even more difficult, complex proposition at Cornell and other institutions of higher learning than it can be at a seminary or convent. By definition, intellectuals work on the margins of the society so that they can see it whole and not be trapped in the whirling vortex of the center, but—as Andrew Dickson White and especially Ezra Cornell understood—they nevertheless have to be in that society (the result of being in a publicly supported institution), while contributing to and, if necessary, fundamentally, constructively criticizing it (a responsibility that comes with the privilege of having tenure). Such responsibility runs the gamut, from conducting state agricultural extension work and creating international science laboratories to training responsible citizens and professionals, including public servants. This responsibility is renewed each spring in the laudatory decision to use Commencement not as a platform for a visiting speaker (or to bestow honorary degrees not earned at Cornell), but as a forum for the university's president to give a major speech in which he accounts for his and the campus's activities of the past year.

Carol Kammen tells this story superbly because she has the ideal combination of experience and disciplinary background. A longtime teacher at Cornell who has offered innovative research and writing courses in the History Department,

she intimately knows the university, its environment, and its traditions after living nearly four decades in Ithaca. She is also a distinguished, pioneering practitioner in the discipline of local history, perhaps the fastest growing of all historical fields. "One of the nation's leading exponents and instructors in local and community history," as one reviewer described her, she understands that hothouse—the necessarily close relationship between Cornell and the central New York region that has become internationally known for the realization of Ezra Cornell's vision. She comprehends the fascinating complexity of the only American university that has both private, endowed colleges and state-supported colleges while being simultaneously committed to the dual humanistic and science-industrial vision of its founders.

Above all, Carol Kammen understands the enormous tension in this community between freedom and responsibility, and how the former is necessarily besieged by the latter. She quotes an early distinguished alumnus, David Starr Jordan, who declared that the "only tradition of which Cornell was proud was that [it] had no tradition." But she observes that traditions indeed took root: the traditions "of tolerance and freedom of expression—and freedom from the rule of force—would be tested again and again." This is an important, highly revealing account of the tests faced by a university committed to melding into a single mission the advancement of humanistic idealism and modern economic and scientific development.

Walter LaFeber
Andrew Tisch and James Tisch University Professor
Cornell University

Preface

THIS BOOK OBSERVES THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A FLOCK and a bird—appropriately enough for a history of a university with a world-famous Laboratory of Ornithology. Birds have individual histories. A flock has its own history, even as the many individual stories continue on their own. Essentially, this book is the history of the flock.

Parts of the individual stories of Cornell University can be found here. But this book is not just the story of the founders, the faculty, the students, buildings, the curriculum, the athletic program, or other worthy and interesting subjects. This book is about Cornell as a university. The university is a private institution, yet it administers and runs four colleges funded by New York State. It is an undergraduate institution with graduate and professional schools. Its teaching mission is located on farm and field, in laboratory and library, in Ithaca and Arecibo, New York City, Buffalo, Geneva, and even Qatar.

A university is partially the land on which it sits and the buildings in which it functions, and place is important. Cornell's campus is one of the most beautiful anywhere. But its location was also thought to be daunting. When asked about various attractive features of the university he was creating, Ezra Cornell is reported to have said, in effect, Well, wait until you see where we are going to put it! A university is also a state of mind. A university reflects the culture of its time and it boasts of its traditions; at the same time a university is always changing.

Cornell began with no traditions and that became a tradition in itself. But a tradition of democracy of studies and of students, a tradition of freedom of thought, a tradition of inquiry defined this institution even while there were those who said traditions be damned. A university is of the world and out of it; it is a retreat that focuses on the condition of the world and attempts to understand it, and perhaps, if we are lucky, to influence it for the better. A university can be no one thing.

We all owe L. William Kay, II, class of 1951, a great debt for making this project possible, and for having the patience to wait for its completion. It was his vision to have a new history of Cornell. It is my hope that this book will please him.

Tom Hickerson, Associate University Librarian, and Elaine Engst, Director of the Rare and Manuscript Collections and University Archivist, asked me to take on this project, wanting a short history that would feature the richness of the Cornell Archives so wonderfully housed in the Carl A. Kroch Library. They have been unfailingly supportive. I have had the most perfect situation in which to work, and

if this volume has taken longer than expected, it might be because I have been so comfortably perched in a study in Kroch Library near all the sources I need, working among people who have been encouraging and helpful. It is a pleasure to say thank you.

My debt to Elaine Engst is great: her understanding of Cornell history and of the collections has been invaluable. I am also very grateful to Susette Newberry, who has been the picture editor for this book, for her knowledge of the vast resources in the Cornell Archives and for selecting the images that appear here. Others from the department have aided me, too. My appreciation goes to Rhea Garen, C.J. Lance-Duboscq, Katherine Reagan, Petrina Jackson, Nancy Dean, Laura Linke, Julia Parker, David Corson, and especially to Cheryl Rowland, whose cheerfulness and knowledge I have relied on and appreciated. Also Ken Baitsholts, Margaret Nichols for her editorial skills, and especially Eileen Keating, who has shared her knowledge of the history of Home Economics and who has aided with numerous problems. Peter Martinez and Bryan Vliet have helped dig me out of the numerous computer problems I managed to create. Librarians are indeed the true friends of historians. My appreciation extends to those who work on the reference desk in Olin Library, who are unfailingly helpful, cheerful, and kind.

I appreciate those who read draft chapters, including Elaine Engst, Michael Kammen, Robert J. Smith, Sally Atwater, Gould Colman, Dale Corson, Joel Silbey, and Walter LaFeber. I benefited from their comments and questions.

There were people all over the university who answered phones, gave out information, and answered questions, often without giving their names. They made tracking down information easy and pleasant. Some of them are Jeri A. Wall of the College of Veterinary Medicine, Pat Avery, Jane MtPleasant, Kathy Alvord, Brenda Bricker, Donald Schnedecker, Esther Baker, Marti Dense, Isaac Kramnick, Michael Busch, Darla McCoy, David Curtis, Tina Snead, Robert Richardson, and most especially David Fontanella, Barbara Krause, and Ann Huntzinger.

Others who helped include Martha Armstrong of the Tompkins County Area Development Agency, Deborah Levin, Ann Reilley, Justin Manzo '03, Deborah Brunner, Lou Robinson, and Sally Atwater, whose advice is always so welcome.

Writing of Cornell, Morris Bishop noted, "The historian is almost bound to be a plagiarist. He is expected to be scrupulous and exact, to tell only what has been securely reported; how, then, can he be blamed for saying precisely what has been said before?" This applies *especially* if those who have gone before are Carl Becker and Morris Bishop, in whose footsteps I humbly follow.

Cornell