



George C. Poppensiek

June 18, 1918 – September 8, 2015

The passing of an outstanding academic naturally inspires recollection of achievements. But at the loss of George Poppensiek, first recollections expressed were of the painful loss of not only an academic, but a true gentleman.

His interpersonal skills were a marked feature of his contribution to the College of Veterinary Medicine. Many of Dr. Poppensiek's colleagues have a collection of letters written by him. If one was interviewed on radio or television, you were bound to receive a letter of praise. If you had bereavement, a beautifully crafted letter would be received. In his letters, Dr. Poppensiek would identify and praise your contributions to the Veterinary College and to Cornell University. Your self-esteem would become elevated very quickly. Probably not good for an academic!

George Charles Poppensiek, Dean Emeritus, and the James Law Professor Emeritus of Comparative Medicine, was born in New York City, NY and raised in Bogota, NJ. He matriculated in the College of Agriculture at Cornell University as a pre-veterinary student in 1936. A year later he transferred to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania to complete the requirements for admission to the School of Veterinary Medicine in that University, from which he was graduated in 1942 as a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine V.M.D.

After serving as an intern in large animal medicine at the School of Veterinary Medicine during the following year, he was appointed as Assistant Professor of Veterinary Science at the University of Maryland where he gained extensive knowledge of rabies. Years later, his rabies expertise led to his appointment as Department Head in Lederle Laboratories of Pearl River, NY, where he was responsible for veterinary virus vaccine production. He returned to Cornell becoming Director of the Diagnostic Laboratory in the College of Veterinary Medicine,

simultaneously pursuing a Master of Science Degree in virology, pathology and biochemistry that he completed in 1951. His research on a number of infectious diseases and vaccinology led to his appointment as Supervisory Veterinarian for Immunological Investigations at the US Department of Agriculture's Plum Island Animal Disease Center a biologically secure research center off Long Island that works exclusively on highly animal infectious diseases not present in the US. From this position he was recruited to Cornell as the fifth Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, serving for 15 years from 1959 to 1974. Emeritus Dean Poppensiek was then appointed as the James Law Professor of Comparative Medicine, teaching Foreign Animal Diseases for 15 years to second-year students a course in Foreign Animal Diseases.

His tenure as Dean saw one of the college's greatest increases in research, supported by the construction of the Veterinary Research Tower, the landmark building at the entrance of the Veterinary College complex. Dr. Poppensiek also increased the international dimensions of the College through his own scientific contributions and professional connections. He was recognized as Chairman of the United States-Argentine Commission on Foot-and-Mouth Disease under the aegis of the National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences. He received the International Veterinary Congress Prize for distinguished service to veterinary science by the American Veterinary Medical Association. He was inducted into the Polish Society for Veterinary Medicine and elected as an external member into the National Argentine Academy of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine. He also served as a member of the Executive Board of a United States-Israel Binational Agricultural Research and Development Fund (BARD).

Dr. Poppensiek was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Microbiology; the Veterinary Radiology Society; the American Society for Microbiology and a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a charter member of the American Society for Virology, and an honorary diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Preventative Medicine, and served as President of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. He was a prolific scientific writer with over 100 publications in several scientific journals. His famous notes for his "Foreign Animal Diseases" class became the seminal source for veterinary student textbooks nationwide.

He is recognized as the instigator for the creation of the "The National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS)" by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to establish a national animal disease surveillance system that still provides one of the more reliable and trusted sources of data on animal diseases in our country today. Dr. Poppensiek named this achievement among his most gratifying.

Emeritus Dean Poppensiek had a passion for finding ways to provide financial assistance to veterinary students. For two decades he served as scientific advisor to the Harold Wetterberg Foundation of Princeton and Montclair, NJ, a philanthropic institution that has been providing substantial financial grants for biomedical research, and also substantial scholarship awards to students who have lived or worked in New Jersey, and who are interested in continuing their university education toward an advanced degree; principally in the biomedical sciences of veterinary medicine.

Former Dean Dr. Robert D. Phemister, upon Dr. Poppensiek's retirement in 1988, established the "George C. Poppensiek Visiting Professorship in Global Animal Health" to honor his contributions to the advancement of the profession internationally. Visiting scholars from many corners of world have been participants of this lectureship in honor of Dean Emeritus Poppensiek.

It is essential to also memorialize and honor Edith Marion Wallace, Dr. Poppensiek's cherished wife and partner of 63 years. Edith and George married in 1943. They were blessed with two loving and gifted children, Neil Allen and Leslie Marion, and five talented grandchildren. Edith died in 2006; his son Neil, a Commander in the US Navy, died in 2008.

David Robertshaw, chair; Kathy Ann Earnest-Koons and Alfonso Torres