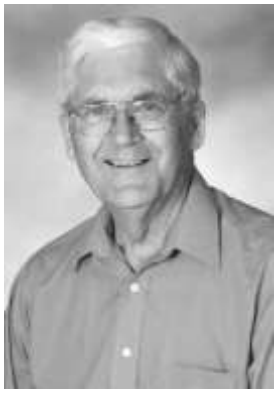

Michael Hugh Dickson

April 2, 1932 – March 28, 2018

Dr. Michael Hugh Dickson, Professor of Horticultural Science, passed away on March 28th, 2018, in Geneva, New York. He was 85 years old.

Mike was born in London, England on April 2, 1932, the son of Dr. Hugh and Eranee Dickson and was from a long line of rose breeders. He spent his first three years of life in Egypt where his father was a plant scientist working on King Tutt's tomb. He grew up in turbulent times in England during World War II and graduated from Charterhouse School. In 1950, he left England to complete his B.S. degree at McGill University (MacDonald College) and then his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Plant Breeding at Michigan State University. He was a professor at Ontario Agricultural University in Guelph, Ontario for six years before moving to the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) at Cornell University in Geneva, New York as a professor in 1964.

At Cornell, Mike established a world class breeding program in common beans and crucifers, resulting in many scientific papers, awards and mentoring of graduate students. He was the President of the Bean Improvement Cooperative (BIC) from 1977 to 1986, and was an active member of the bean research community throughout his career. He received the Meritorious Service Award from the BIC in 1987, and was elected Fellow of the American Society for Horticultural Science before retiring in 1995.

Mike was widely respected and well known for doing cooperative, multi-disciplinary research leading to the development of disease and insect resistance in several crops, including common beans. His work included the development of beans with high levels of resistance to root rots and white mold, and heat and cold tolerance. His recurrent snap bean breeding lines with white mold resistance have been widely dispersed. Mike was also well known for developing new techniques to support breeding efforts including approaches to test for bean seed-coat shattering and the straw test to evaluate plants for white mold resistance in beans. The straw test method, published as a two-page BIC report in 1996, has more than 100 citations, and is still used worldwide.

In addition to his work with beans, he developed 'persistent white' cauliflower that allows curds to remain white in direct sunlight without self-wrapping leaves or being tied. He also developed and advanced the orange cauliflower. He developed cabbage breeding lines with glossy leaves which reduce damage from the diamondback moth, selected materials resistant to soft rot with Dr. Jianping Ren and developed broccoli with tolerance to high temperatures. Among his most influential efforts was the development of cabbage with resistance to black rot, the world's most damaging disease of *Brassica* vegetables. These materials have been utilized by seed companies worldwide and have made significant contributions to yield stability of cabbage and food security. Lisa Earle, brassica breeder and Cornell Professor Emeritus had this to say about Mike. "It was a pleasure to collaborate with Mike on our long-term field to lab to field *Brassica* project. He was a warm, generous, and thoughtful man, always good company, helpful to students, and with broad interests well beyond vegetable breeding."

Mike mentored dozens of graduate students who have gone on to have very successful careers of their own. Molly Jahn, professor and former Dean of the College of Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison studied with Mike in the 1980's. She recalled a life lesson Mike taught her after a particularly difficult week that found her unable to keep up with her work. He asked a simple question, "why didn't you ask for help?" That simple question taught Molly that not only is plant breeding a team sport, but so is life. It was that kind of attentive, plain, pure kindness, insight, and wisdom that she remembers most fondly about him.

Susan Brown, Professor of Horticulture and apple breeder at Cornell AgriTech, remembers Mike "as a kind, meticulous, engaged plant breeder, yet one whose dry sense of humor could surprise you. Mike was among the first to welcome me into the department and he was sincerely interested in making sure I was off to a good start. He liked sharing stories of his daughters and past students' achievements. He was proud of his role as a mentor and was very generous with his time. You could joke with Mike and he enjoyed the banter, even when it was at his expense. We miss Mike as a colleague, fellow breeder and friend."

Current Horticulture chair Steve Reiners shared that Mike headed up the search committee that hired him and did everything he could to make sure he and his family felt at home. "He invited us to his home, his church, he and his wife Jean even found a babysitter for our children. That was just the kind of friend and colleague he was."

Mike married his college sweetheart, Jean Hamilton, in 1958. They would have celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in August. Over the years they entertained many guests from around the world. In their retirement, he and Jean travelled the world, spending fifteen winters in their Tucson, Arizona home and visiting with their children and families. Mike stopped by the W1150 Regional Project meeting held in Tucson in 2011 and received a standing ovation from the participants which attested to the respect for him by the bean community. Mike had many hobbies including gardening, sailing, skiing, reading and painting in oil and watercolors. He was a long-term member of the Presbyterian Church in Geneva, a former board member of the Geneva Public Library, Commodore of the Seneca Yacht Club and a member of several other Geneva organizations. He is survived by his beloved wife Jean; his daughters Nancy (David Korn), Jane (Rob Purser) and Roslyn (Paula Black); and his grandchildren Mario, and Isabel

Purser, Blake and Drew Korn.

Written by Phillip D. Griffiths (chair), Molly Jahn and Stephen Reiners