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MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ON THE DEATH OF EMERITUS PROFESSOR WILLIAM NOBLE CLARK

Noble Clark was engaged in research administration for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences through the tenure of five deans—from 1927 until his retirement in 1962. These years marked a period of rapid growth and constant change in the College's research program—some of the most fruitful years of discovery. There were 80 scientists on the staff when Clark arrived in the College and 250 when he retired. He pushed the College's research efforts towards basic research and also encouraged investigations in social sciences such as agricultural economics, rural sociology and agricultural education.

Clark died May 6, 1988, in Seattle, Washington, at the age of 96. He was born in Lake Preston, South Dakota, in 1891 and grew up on a Minnesota farm. He earned the B.S. and M.S. degrees from the University of Wisconsin in 1915 and 1930 respectively and did additional graduate work at the University of Minnesota and Northwestern University. He married Margaret Hunt in Madison in 1918 and the couple had three children. Preceding him in death was his wife and son, William. Daughters Janet and Susan (Seattle), brother Kenneth (Arizona) and sister-in-law Mrs. Mary Hunt Gross (Madison) survive, as well as eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Several of the grandchildren plan to contribute to a memorial for their grandfather somewhere on campus.

After his B.S. degree, Clark taught at Michigan State for two years, then managed a large farm in Cook County, Illinois, for a year. He was agricultural advisor for a Wisconsin land colonization for several years and county agricultural agent in Michigan for five years before joining the University of Wisconsin staff.

He was recruited by the College's second dean, Harry L. Russell, to serve as his assistant. Three years later, upon completion of his M.S. degree, he was named Assistant Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station, the College's research division. In 1938, he became Associate Director, the position he kept until his retirement.

Not a scientist himself, Clark took little credit for the scientific advances that came out of experiment station laboratories during his years as research administrator. But his scientific colleagues acknowledged the importance of Clark's wise administrative policies in the success of the research program.

"A good research administrator doesn't try to direct the immediate goals or day-to-day work of the scientists," one colleague stated at the time of Clark's retirement. "The wise administrator rather picks capable, forward-looking scientists for his staff, then gives them the freedom and funds to carry their programs forward. Noble Clark did this and protected his staff from undue outside interference which lessens the freedom of scientists to plan, carry out and report their specialized technical operations."

Clark's administrative style was decisive and forceful, often bringing him into conflict with other administrators. He nurtured and championed his research staff, and was straightforward in taking sometimes unpopular stands in their behalf.

He was always concerned with the welfare of rural people. In 1950-51 he served on President's Truman's Commission on Migratory Labor, and lobbied for better educational opportunities for migrant children for the rest of his life. In many talks during the 1960s he urged expansion of non-agricultural vocational education for farm youths. "We need to give our farm children a fair deal," he stated in 1961. "They need, they should have, and should be encouraged to take advantage of educational opportunities so they can make the most of their inherent capabilities.... They deserve better than to find themselves faced with urban employment their best alternative, but forced to write on their job application that they are unskilled."

Throughout his professional career and even after his retirement, Clark was intensely concerned with world-wide problems of food supply. Immediately after World War II he served as deputy director of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The year before, he had headed a five-nation FAO mission which surveyed agricultural production in Poland. From 1943 to 1948 he was chairman of the Committee on Postwar Agricultural Policy of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. He was an early and vocal proponent for helping underdeveloped nations create agricultural research systems.

Clark was one of the first experiment station directors to promote and encourage interstate collaboration on research, and his persuasive efforts with other directors and federal agencies were largely responsible for establishing regional and inter-regional research programs in which scientists could work together in efficiently attacking problems of concern beyond boundaries of a single state.

Noble Clark will be remembered as a wise and farsighted administrator who guided the University's agricultural research for 35 of its most productive years.

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