

Tom Sherman Hamilton, 1894–1972: A Brief Biography

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On October 16–17, 1962, a symposium was held on the campus of the University of Illinois to commemorate the centennial of the establishment of the Land Grant Act. The title of the meeting was “Protein Nutrition and Metabolism.” Its featured speakers were T. S. Hamilton, H. H. Mitchell, professors of animal nutrition, and W. C. Rose, professor of biochemistry. These three men had spent their professional lives on the University of Illinois campus. Hamilton’s inclusion as a featured speaker reflected the respect he engendered from his Illinois associates and his scientific peers. The entire program was published as Special Publication No. 4 of the University of Illinois and State Agricultural Experiment Station.

Tom Hamilton was born in Paris, IL, on April 21, 1894, and attended grade schools in Edgar County

(1902–1908) and Paris High School (1908–1912). He was trained as a chemist and nutritionist at the University of Illinois, from which he received his B. S. (1917), M. S. (1922) and, at a later date, his Ph.D. (1937) degrees.

After receiving his B. S. degree, Tom served from 1917 to 1919 as a Drill Master in the school of Military Aeronautics, Urbana, IL. He was a member of the Aviation Section Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps, U.S. Army.

In 1920, he joined the staff of the Division of Animal Nutrition, Department of Animal Science with the title First Assistant in Animal Nutrition. He started his professional career there after receiving his M. S. degree in 1922 by accepting an appointment as Instructor in Animal Nutrition at the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station, where he would continue to serve until 1954 with progressively increasing responsibilities.

He worked closely with Dr. H. H. Mitchell and was considered his strong “right hand” for many years. It was Dr. Mitchell who served as his major advisor for his Ph.D. degree, and it was from his thesis work that his two most significant research papers originated. They were companion papers in the *Journal of Nutrition* in 1939. In these papers, Hamilton demonstrated that the feeding of protein-deficient diets to rats causes more fat and less protein in the weight gain. He also demonstrated that well-balanced diets contain greater net energy because they produce a lower heat increment. Professor Hamilton’s other most notable publication was a book published in 1929, coauthored with H. H. Mitchell, titled *Biochemistry of the Amino Acids*. This 619-page book was considered to be the most important reference on comparative protein-amino acid nutrition for the next 25 yr.

Professor Hamilton’s wife, Mabel, was an avid gardener, and Tom like to help with the gardening. He was particularly proud of his gladiolus blooms. The Hamiltons had two children, a daughter and a son. Their son was a pilot in World War II and lost his life when his plane went down.

Tom was also an award-winning craftsman in silver-smithing, which he enjoyed as a respite from his busy days on campus. Some associates described Professor Hamilton as a private person, not one to discuss personal matters or to include other staff in nonprofessional social activities.

Teaching was something he enjoyed and at which he excelled. Two of the courses he taught, “Principles of Animal Nutrition” and “Laboratory Methods in Animal Nutrition,” were well attended by undergraduate and

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graduate students (domestic and foreign) and were reported to be both informative and stimulating beyond the basic scientific information provided. As with most teachers, he took pride in the many accomplishments of his students.

Finishing his career as Associate Director of the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station, he retired in 1962. Over the years, his professional relationships were mainly with the National Academy of Science-Committee on Animal Nutrition (1950s), the U.N. Foreign Agricultural Organization, the American Society of Animal Science, and the American Institute of Nutrition. His final assignment was his highly respected service as Administrative Secretary to the North Central Agricultural Experiment Station Directors.

As a scientist, teacher, and administrator, Tom Hamilton elicited the respect of his peers and served as a fine representative of the U.S. Land Grant System. He and Mrs. Hamilton resided in Champaign, IL, up to the time of his death in 1972.

Literature Cited

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