

# Victor Arthur Rice, 1890–1964: A Brief Biography

Frederick N. Andrew<sup>1</sup>



Victor Arthur Rice was a classic professor for his generation; he was truly a man for all seasons. He was an unusually bright and perceptive person. To him, it was only logical that he would become the best teacher in his department and logically become its head. By establishing his department as the best in his school, he would become dean, and so it came to be.

At the prestigious private schools, the best teachers became department heads and earned the right to teach freshmen. Even though that may seem strange to students and young professors today, it was a remarkably effective system, and “Prof” Rice was an important part of it.

The introductory course in animal husbandry dealt with types and market classes and breeds of livestock. In Massachusetts, students were very familiar with the breeds of dairy cattle, but beef types grazing the wheat fields of Oklahoma and Kansas in late winter,

carriage horses of breeds that no longer exist, Missouri mules, and the assignment of fat cattle to agents at the Chicago stockyards were wholly new. Prof taught this course with enthusiasm and authority. Freshmen had never been exposed to a person of his intelligence, vigor, wit, and knowledge of the world.

Professor Rice was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on May 4, 1890. He moved to North Carolina in 1908 with the intention of becoming a farmer. In 1912, he decided to pursue further education and enrolled at the North Carolina State College. Graduating with honors in 1916, he was immediately appointed Assistant State 4-H Club leader in Massachusetts. His leadership in improving productivity on farms and family garden plots attracted attention. How many dairy, pig, and sheep projects he helped establish will never be known. That he must have affected the careers of many farm boys and girls is obvious by the quality of the students who enrolled in animal husbandry and by the large number of nationally recognized dairy herds in the state.

Professor Rice received the American Society of Animal Production Teaching Award in 1961. It was then, and still is, difficult for a teacher to become nationally recognized. The Society established the award in 1956, and Rice was third to be honored. Four other recipients of the American Society of Animal Science Distinguished Teacher Award were either his students or young faculty whom he hired. They were M. E. Ensminger in 1960, L. V. Tirrell in 1967, Lowell Walters in 1984, and Don Kinsman in 1990. In addition, several others, Ralph W. Phillips in 1957 and Fred N. Andrews in 1961, were awarded the very prestigious Morrison Award of the ASAS, and W. A. “Al” Cowan received the Animal Industry Service Award in 1993. Ralph Phillips received the first ASAS International Agriculture Award in 1975 and Don Kinsman received one in 1992.

When he began as a faculty member in 1919, agricultural colleges did not have the prestige of the Ivy League schools or the liberal arts colleges in the New England area. Professor Rice developed his course in animal breeding as a scientific course with a liberal arts flavor. He was a student of history and was fascinated by the origin of life; the first four editions of his book, *The Breeding and Improvement of Farm Animals*, took the reader back 1.2 billion yr to its estimated origin.

There was no doubt in Prof’s mind that his students should have a thorough grounding in the origin of humans, the domestication of animals, and development of agriculture. The religious aspects of evolution

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were not emphasized. But it was accepted by students that they should have a thorough knowledge of the evolution of horses; the domestication of cattle, sheep, and swine; and the eventual development of the various breeds of livestock. The development of Victor Rice's teaching objectives is clearly described in *Breeding and Improvement of Farm Animals*, which went through several editions, several languages, and was a classic even in its day. In 1934, he wrote that "the art of breeding animals antedates by many centuries any scientific knowledge of the underlying principles of reproductive physiology and genetics. Without definite knowledge of principles a high degree of excellence in the production of beautiful and efficient animals was achieved by the method of trial and error. In the field of reproductive physiology, significant discoveries have been made in matters pertaining to the endocrine control of sex manifestations, as well as in those dealing with the maintenance of genital health and normal activity. Great strides have been made also in the science of genetics and new phases of this subject have been developed." This preface was prophetic, although we were unaware of it at the time.

In the preface of the third edition he wrote the following: "The author has proceeded on the basis that undergraduate students in animal husbandry should have one complete course in animal breeding with reproductive physiology, genetics, and the art of breeding brought together into one complete whole." Professor Rice was a perfectionist. He made every effort to seek advice from experts in many areas. In his 1951 edition, for which he invited F. N. Andrews to become a coauthor, he stated that "significant advances have been made in all these fields: a broadened recognition of the fundamental aspects of animal agriculture together with breed advancements, and shifting emphasis among the various classes of livestock." Emphasis was placed on the hormonal regulation of reproduction and the widespread use of artificial insemination. The basic laws of inheritance and their applications to livestock improvement and new knowledge of the mechanisms of heredity and their application in practical breeding were featured. As in the past, he sought the advice of many others, including E. J. Warwick, who contributed a chapter on selection in meat animals.

Prof and his wife Lollie added their own talents to the community. They sang in the church choir, were in casts of several plays, and sang in an operetta. They had two daughters, Zippora and Mary Virginia.

Prof lived in the times of the classic student-athlete. He was quarterback of the North Carolina State team that upset Navy in 1915. In the late afternoon, as Prof walked toward his home on the other side of town, he stopped at football practice and made suggestions on techniques and strategy. Several of his students were members of varsity teams.

Retiring after 39 yr of service at the University of Massachusetts, Victor Rice returned to his alma mater, North Carolina State College, in 1955. Although he had been born in Ohio and was steeped in New England tradition, North Carolina was perhaps his true home. They had conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Agriculture upon him in 1946.

In the warm and hospitable atmosphere at Raleigh, NC, Victor Rice embarked on another career. His first assignment as Acting Director of Instruction was the organization of a freshman course entitled "Agriculture in World Affairs." These, like freshmen 25 yr earlier, had probably never been exposed to a world far beyond North Carolina.

Professor Rice was an excellent judge of people and eager to explore their talents. He asked Everett Warwick, an author on the sixth edition, and one of his colleagues at North Carolina State, J. E. Legates, to take a leading role in a completely revised sixth edition. As he read the drafts of the various chapters, he had both the satisfaction of sharing and knowing that it would be a job well done.

Although his book was his greatest work, Victor Rice truly was a man for all seasons. He was much aware of the importance of what is now called "communication." He was a brilliant and interesting speaker and was consistently called upon to address agricultural and business groups. He was determined that all animal husbandry students would have something to say and know how to say it. Even though all were required to take two full years of English and English literature and a full year of public speaking, that was not sufficient for Prof. He held a weekly seminar for seniors in which there were assigned topics far broader than how to judge a class of Ayrshire heifers. He was a severe critic but was constructive, and, by the end of the semester, each class was like a speech contest. He gave each student a private critique on what he perceived to be our strengths and weaknesses. He knew that in later life, whatever our vocations, success would be related to the individual's ability to explain his work in a convincing manner.

Victor Rice was ahead of his time in developing a system by which students could rate his total performance, knowledge of subject matter, clarity of presentation, openness to questions, fairness, personal appearance, and other factors related to effective teaching. He likewise sought the views of alumni regarding the adequacy of their training for their job-related activities. As dean, he urged his faculty to use some type of student evaluation. Some of us who became teachers adopted his questionnaire and urged our colleagues to do likewise.

He did not confine his activities to teaching, research, and administration. He was prepared to judge a show or to discuss the control of tuberculosis and brucellosis, government programs in milk marketing, the value of pasture rotation, the nutritional

importance of alfalfa for winter milk production, or whatever subject his audience had requested. He was an inspirational speaker and a favorite with professional and business groups, for whom his range of topics was almost encyclopedic.

Professor Rice was an early and enthusiastic supporter of artificial insemination as an effective method of extending the influence of superior sires. He was a friend and advisor to Mr. Prentice's son Rockefeller Prentice, who established the internationally known American Breeders Service. He had studied Mendelian genetics and, like others of his time, sought ways to apply genetics in the selection process in farm animals. Corn breeders were benefiting in a very large way, but, for practical livestock producers, it was still "roulette." Victor Rice did not believe in the long vacations that academics took in the summer months. When the routine things of the day had been accomplished, he could be found in the herd book room either working on his book or studying records.

One problem consumed him. How to select herd bulls. Champions of the show ring were available. They were photographed and painted in oils, but it had been demonstrated that beauty was not closely related to milk production. Prof liked to work with numbers, and the advanced registry tests of the breed associations and cow testing organizations were available. The idea of indexing dairy bulls for production appealed to him, and he made it his life's work. It was not a new idea. Pearl, Gowen, and Miner, in the neighboring state of Maine had worked out an index in 1919. The well-known geneticists of the time, Yapp, Gaines, Turner, Graves, Goodale, Wright, Lush, and others, had tackled the problem. In 1944, Rice published "a new method for indexing dairy bulls" in the *Journal of Dairy Science*. He called it the Regression Index. It was explained in detail in the fourth edition of his book, published in 1951. It took into account the milk production of a sire's daughters' comparisons with their dams and the average milk production of the specific breed. It was a step in the right direction but was limited by the number of usable records of daughters of a given dam. Prof was well aware of and sometimes frustrated by the small numbers, and he predicted that the application of artificial insemination would revolutionize the proving of bulls.

Although he did not live to see the published sixth edition of his book, he knew what Ed Legates would write: "Only a small proportion of the potential males are needed with artificial insemination and a single sire can leave from 20,000 to 40,000 progeny per year. Extensive programs for planned progeny testing have been developed by artificial insemination organizations to locate genetically superior sires."

Dr. Lowell Walters, Emeritus Professor of Animal Science at Oklahoma State University remembers "Prof" for the great influence he had on his life and

very successful career with this tribute: "My earliest awareness of the greatness of this man occurred in the late 1930s having taken a course in animal breeding at Oklahoma A&M College, when the text for the course was entitled the *Breeding and Improvement of Farm Animals* by V. A. Rice. In addition to the text, the outside reading in this course included several scientific papers written by him. Shortly thereafter, it became my good fortune to have an opportunity to work with him as a graduate student and then later as a faculty member in his Animal Husbandry Department. Prof was first and foremost a true humanitarian with great interest in the concern for the welfare of each of his students and faculty members. He had a keen eye for evaluating student needs and the development of new and revolutionary teaching methods, which made him a great teacher. He was the most inspiring, thought-provoking, and knowledgeable role model for the student that I have known in over 50 yr of service in three animal science departments in the United States."

Dr. W. A. "Al" Cowan, Emeritus Professor of Animal Science at the University of Connecticut and 32-yr head of the Animal Science Department, remembers with fondness this one-of-a-kind man and teacher. Al was an undergraduate student under Rice from 1938 to 1942. After World War II, Al was hired as an assistant professor by Prof Rice and worked under him. "V. A. Rice was the greatest influence on my development and career. Rice inspired by word and deed and challenged me to do my very best. His interest and input were one of a kind. He was the finest college teacher to whom I was ever exposed. Just as important, V. A. Rice instilled great respect from all for his intellect, breadth, and as a citizen of the world. During 6 yr as a faculty member he asked me to teach practically every course in the animal husbandry offerings. These many courses consumed me. For my future, it was one of the best things to happen. If he saw we were struggling to keep up, he would jokingly say, 'A few fleas are good for a dog—it will keep him scratching.' He shared this truism with a smile. With his urging, I completed my advanced degrees. I know that in large part it was his recommendation that resulted in my move to a professorship and head of the department at UConn. As a teacher, scientist, and person, Prof was a prolific developer of men. Whether they wound up farming, in agricultural extension, with industry, or in education, his philosophy and performance were transmitted to others."

Professor V. A. Rice was an active member of Phi Kappa Phi, Sigma Xi, and Alpha Zeta and the American Dairy Science Association, American Society of Animal Production (Science), American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Genetics Society, and American Eugenics Society. He retired to Deland, Florida, in 1960 and died there on June 25, 1964, at 74 yr of age.