

George Chapman Caldwell

August 14, 1834 — September 7, 1907

“The Faculty of Cornell University inscribes the following tribute to the memory and worth of the late George Chapman Caldwell, Professor of Agricultural Chemistry in the institution from its inauguration in 1868 up to his retirement as emeritus in 1902, of analytical chemistry since 1875 and of general chemistry since 1891.

Educated in Harvard and Göttingen, after a teaching experience in Antioch College, O., and the Agricultural College of Pa., he was the first professor appointed to the faculty of Cornell, where he presided for 34 years over the Chemical Department, while it grew from a small class-room and laboratory until it taxed the capacity of two large buildings with a teaching staff of 21 — one of the leading centers of chemical education and achievement in the world.

In the chemical profession he early took high rank, his book on agricultural chemical analysis, the first work on that subject in English, was at once accepted as an authority and aroused an active interest in the important field which had been so brilliantly exploited by Liebig in Germany. His text books on analytical chemistry received a corresponding wide appreciation and adoption.

It was characteristic of Professor Caldwell that he kept himself in closest touch with all advances in a rapidly developing “and almost illimitable subject, and unfolded this to his students in class room and laboratory, inculcating and enforcing such precision of method and thoroughness as would make all work of a full and permanent value. The many students, trained under him, and who now occupy prominent positions in teaching, in government service, in agricultural experiment stations and in collegiate and industrial positions, and their uniform success, bear forcible testimony to the efficiency and value of Professor Caldwell’s teaching.

His varied and comprehensive acquaintance with all divisions of the field of chemistry and the critical acumen with which he had worked out each subject received deserved recognition when, in 1892, he was elected to the presidency of the American Chemical Society. This great capacity for accurate and excellent work was early recognized by the Faculty, in which he served as Secretary from 1872 to 1886. The intimate acquaintance thus secured with all departments of the University work rendered him a trusted and valued adviser in all matters of university policy.

Not of an assertive nature Dr. Caldwell stood out as a great man on the basis of strenuous work, thoroughness in every detail, accuracy in every result, and a sound judgment in seeking and arriving at the truth.

His social life harmonized with his professional. His was the quiet, abiding friendship, the valued advice, the sterling example, the safe guidance. His students owed their prospects in life no less to this worthy influence than to the great excellence of his instruction, and everywhere they unite in thankfulness that they were brought under the influence of such a man. His name is to us a memory of the early builders of the University, a man deeply imbued with the scientific spirit, one who inspired his students to their best efforts in spite of the personally unostentatious disposition, a sincere lover of truth, and a worker who never wearied in well-doing.

James Law, B. G. Wilder, L. M. Dennis

Source: Records, p. 402, December 13, 1907