



Harold R. Capener

December 31, 1919 – October 13, 2016

Harold Rigby Capener was born December 31, 1919 in Garland UT. After attending Utah State University with a major in sociology, he graduated and immediately enlisted in the Marine Corps where he served in the Pacific theatre. After discharge, he went back to Utah State University, earned a Masters in Sociology for a study of the duplication and coordination among 36 community organizations in Logan, UT. This is a theme of how sociological insights can be useful that held his interest throughout his life. He came to Cornell for a Ph.D. His dissertation investigated the same issues of organizational processes for Cooperative Extension programming in the community. His commitment to the application of sociology exemplified his entire career. Community Organization was also his assignment in the four years he was employed in Public Health Service. When he came to academia at Ohio State University it was also with a focus on Cooperative Extension programs in Ohio. Even the shift to five years of international work in India had the assignment to enhance the teaching of Extension Education at the University of Ludhiana in the Indian Punjab. He finished his term in India as the Group Leader for the Ohio State Team of Advisors.

This background in applied work attracted him to an appointment at Cornell University in 1964. He came as a full professor and within two years was appointed Department Head. It was during this decade that department structures were changed from a leadership position called “Head” to the concept of “Chair,” with all its implications of a more participatory structure. His ten years of service as Chair were at the beginning of two decades of major changes in the substantive topics that define a discipline. New topics of study in the discipline of sociology throughout the country included the sociology of the environment, the sociology of agricultural change both in the US and internationally, the focus on women’s contribution to development, the application of quantitative research techniques vs an emphasis on qualitative participatory methods, and, even,

to the meaning of development itself. Often chairing contentious meetings, Cape, as he was fondly known, could encourage everyone to voice their thoughts — civilly. He had a talent for calming the debate waters during department meetings. This talent was especially evident during the turbulent sixties when the graduate students demanded a vote on all departmental issues.

An important feature of Professor Capener's career was his role in evaluating programs. He was selected to participate in many review teams, often as the Team Leader. These reviews took him to other universities as well as Brazil, Egypt, back to India, Yemen, Pakistan, Guatemala, and Liberia. Cape played an important role on the long history of international engagement by social scientists in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The Department of Development Sociology, in particular, proudly continues to focus on international development in the tradition of Professor Capener. He was also committed to the professional organization of the Rural Sociological Society in which he served many roles, on many committees, and finally was elected President of the Society in 1975. The title of his Presidential Address to the 800 plus Rural Sociologists in the Society elucidates his primary interest: "A Discipline in Search of Application." He wrote or co-authored dozens of articles, book chapters, bulletins, and reports. Work culminating his career was mostly on water resources, water quality, problems of pollution, and public participation in resolving conflicts.

His community participation was also notable. He served in a variety of positions in the LDS church, locally, regionally, statewide and nationally. His wife, Karrol, born in Cedar City, UT, participated with him from the time of their marriage. Just prior to his enlistment in the Marines, throughout his many adventures. Karrol and an infant daughter, Chari predeceased him. He leaves three sons, Brian, Chris, Robert, and a daughter, Lori. He spent his last six years in an Assisted Living Center in Sandy UT where, we are told, he was known for his "kindness and optimism." And so, he will be etched in our memories also.

Written by Eugene Erickson (Chair), Joe Francis, Max Pfeffer and Frank Young