Remembering Charles Kellogg

R. L. Kellogg

Charles Kellogg began his career as a teacher of soil science at North Dakota State Agricultural College (which has since become North Dakota State University) in 1929 and continued in that position for four years, when he joined the Soil Survey of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1934. Students populate my memories of our life in Fargo. Several college women boarded at our house, and my father’s students were vivid presences in our lives. They remained family friends for the rest of my father’s lifetime, and in an extended sense of the word, he remained a teacher as well.

Early on, I learned that a soil scientist, especially a surveyor, spends most of his summers in the field. For quite a few years my mother, in the best spirit of American frontier womanhood, would set out from Fargo in our 1929 Pontiac and drive the 1000 miles to our family’s farm neighborhood in central Michigan. That car did not have a trunk, so all the luggage had to be tied behind a sort of folding gate on the running board. Several times one of my father’s students, a delightful and generous man named Red Striker, drove with us to eastern Minnesota. It was good to have a man along for the times (and they were not rare) when it was necessary to take all the bags off the running board to get at the jack and spare tire. Although on occasion my mother proved herself equal to the task.

Essentially, all life depends upon the soil.... There can be no life without soil and no soil without life; they have evolved together.

Charles E. Kellogg, *USDA Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1938

My two sets of grandparents were still young enough to be active and entertaining. They lived only 5 miles from each other, and we all had what I considered to be a grand time. My sister and I would shuttle back and forth, spending about a week with the Kelloggs and a week with my mother’s parents, the Reasoners. During my time with the Kelloggs I inevitably learned a lot about both my father and my great grandparents and the farm my great grandfather had homesteaded, coming out from Tompkins County, New York. People would say that I looked and talked a lot like my father, which of course flattered me. I was a pretty skinny little kid, and once my grandfather and I walked up to a neighbor some distance away from us. He said he wasn’t sure at a distance who I was, “But I said to myself if that’s Charlie he’s

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1 Editors Note: Charles Kellogg was the Chief of the U.S. Soil Survey for 37 years until his retirement in 1971. This is a presentation made by Robert Kellogg last fall (November, 2002) at the ASA–CSSA–SSSA Annual Meetings in Indianapolis, IN as part of the Kellogg Symposium. Robert, son of Charles Kellogg, is a retired professor of English literature at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. He and his wife reside in Charlottesville in the winter and in Reykjavik, Iceland during the summer months. (email: rlk@virginia.edu)