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By rights, perhaps, this Silver Jubilee Symposium should never have happened. For in May 1944 the conclusion was reached that "except for the fact that a University College is already in existence there, Armidale is not a suitable centre for the study of Rural Economy." At least that was the conclusion reached by a Committee of the University of Sydney Professorial Board, set up to consider a proposal from the Primary Producers Union for a faculty of rural economy at the New England University College.



Such a faculty had been a goal of the NEUC practically ever since its establishment in 1938. Its proponents originally did not have in mind a separate department or faculty of agricultural economics. Rural economy broadly comprehended basic agriculture, animal husbandry and practical farm management, with some introduction to related aspects of economics, accounting and rural law.

The Sydney Professorial Board's Committee was not convinced that such a course properly belonged in a university curriculum. It also felt that Armidale's location was unsuitable. The place, they held, was "representative of a comparatively small area - the Northern Tablelands - where the climatic and other conditions are quite different from those in our great agricultural and mixed farm region to the west of the mountains."

This must have incensed the Advisory Council of the



NEUC, which had seen clearly from the outset that Armidale's rural location gave it, in common with the other three million square miles or so of Australia outside the capital cities, a unique advantage for the pursuit of rural studies. In the end, however, the importance of dynamic elements in comparative advantage was manifested. Armidale alone amongst rural centres already had an established university-level institution.

The Sydney University Senate did not reach a decision on the proposal for rural economy but asked the Professorial Board to nominate a small committee to confer with representatives of the New England Advisory Council with a view to submitting a combined report at a later date. The Registrar, Mr W.A. Selle, wrote to Dr Edgar Booth, Warden of NEUC, on 28 June 1944 informing him that this committee had been appointed and consisted of the Deans of the Faculties of Agriculture, Veterinary Science and Economics. It was left in Dr Booth's hands to call the meeting with representatives of the NEUC Advisory Council. The meeting was never held, probably because the proposal was undergoing reformulation and ideas on the nature of the course or courses to be developed at Armidale were being radically changed at the time.

A broadsheet on "The Need for a Faculty of Agricultural Economics" was drafted during the second half of 1944 by Dr James Belshaw, Deputy Warden of the University College, and the Hon. D.H. Drummond, State Minister of Education at the time of its establishment. This was later issued as a White Paper. It not only presented the case for specialised teaching and research facilities in Australia but suggested the scope and nature of possible research projects and outlined a possible four-year course leading to a degree of bachelor of agricultural economics. It even tentatively suggested a teaching staff requirement of about ten persons including a professor and three other agricultural economists.

Clearly, therefore, Professor Belshaw provided most of the early thinking on the proposed development of agricultural economics at Armidale. More importantly he provided sustained initiative towards this development. Nothing can obscure that, except perhaps the tendency for the woodwork of any successful development to yield more staunch proponents in retrospect than may have been evident at the time.

One active and influential supporter of the proposal, however, was Mr J.G. Crawford, now Professor Sir John Crawford, the first Director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and previously Economist to the Rural Bank and Economic Adviser to the N.S.W. Department of Agriculture. Sir John is mentioned very early in the minutes of the Advisory Council as a person who might be able to help. He has been helping ever since. His most recent contribution has been the donation of his vast personal library collection to the J.N. Lewis Library in the Faculty of Economic Studies. This gift will be of invaluable assistance in building the Library as a major research resource.

In 1948, following appointment of Dr R.B. Madgwick as Warden of the University College, Sir John was asked to help guide the Advisory Council in its detailed planning for future agricultural economics courses. He developed recommendations for a teaching program and staffing which were revised and elaborated further in 1955, and taken into consideration along with those of Dr Belshaw.

In October 1948, in a memorandum to the Warden of the College, Dr Belshaw mentioned a long-run intention to travel overseas and examine teaching, research and extension programs in agricultural economics. He proposed visits to universities, government and inter-governmental agencies in the U.S.A., the United Kingdom and on the Continent. In 1952 he was awarded a joint Fulbright-Smith Mundt Fellowship to make this tour. The University College also provided him with a travel grant of about 1,000 pounds which came from a donation of 3,000 pounds, received from the Hon. D.H. Drummond for the development of rural economics. Dr Belshaw devoted his study leave to this project.

Before setting out, he had extensively canvassed, by personal visits and correspondence, the views of government bodies, banks and other institutions and individuals with an interest in the economics of agriculture. He regarded this as a necessary preliminary to his investigations overseas. As I recollect from one of his visits to the BAE, he was also promoting strongly not only the need for formal training programs in Australia but also the advantages of New England as a centre for their development.

I would like to be able to say that I warned him against the folly of proceeding with these plans but by the time we



met at Harvard, during his study tour, he had me sold on the proposal, although I never dreamed I would myself become involved.

On his return to Armidale Dr Belshaw submitted a detailed report on the programs and facilities of the various institutions he had visited. In this he developed detailed proposals and course outlines for a faculty of agricultural economics. This report was to become one of the basic working documents when the Faculty was set up a few years later.

Incidentally, during my examination of the limited archives material available on the background to the Faculty, I encountered a memorandum in which Dr Belshaw had defined the requirements for the Dean of a faculty of agricultural economics. It was important, he said, that the person selected "knows what agricultural economics is about, has a grasp of economic principles, has sufficient imagination to see the relationship between subjects, can get on with his staff in a reasonable way and is a competent administrator." Whether the person eventually appointed had all five of these essential attributes, I can't say. When I asked Professor Belshaw, he made some cryptic remark to the effect that three out of five is a pass but by no means a high distinction.

When the University of New England gained autonomy in 1954, its act of incorporation explicitly referred to the contemplated developments. The Act provided that "The University may establish such Faculties, Schools and Departments as are deemed desirable, including (a) a Faculty of Arts; (b) a Faculty of Science; (c) a Faculty of Animal Husbandry; and (d) a Faculty of Agricultural Economics."

The University proceeded immediately to establish the Faculty of Rural Science. An interim Faculty of Agricultural Economics was also set up. Staffing appointments were temporarily delayed, however, by lack of finance which obliged the Council at its first meeting to decide not to adopt a recommendation from the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Madgwick, urging that a professor of agricultural economics and a senior lecturer be added to the Faculty of Rural Science as soon as that Faculty was placed on an operational basis.

Dr Belshaw unsuccessfully urged the need to appoint staff during 1955 if teaching in agricultural economics were to

commence the following year. Although funds for the initial appointments were still lacking, the Council, in October 1955, decided to commence teaching in agricultural economics simultaneously with rural science in March 1956. The lead time proved quite insufficient to get adequate information out to schools and careers advisers in time to generate interest from school leavers. In February 1956 it was reported to the Council that, while enrolments in rural science were encouraging, only two applicants for admission to agricultural economics had materialised. The Council thereupon rescinded the decision to commence tuition of agricultural economics in 1956. One of the two seeking enrolment, Don Muir, a Dookie Agricultural College diplomate, took a job with CSIRO to tide him over until the actual launching of the degree course two years later. This firmly establishes his claim to have been the Faculty's first undergraduate student.

A grant of 20,000 pounds from the Rural Credits Development Fund had at this time been approved by the Commonwealth Bank (subsequently the Reserve Bank) to finance research in agricultural economics at the University of New England. The research envisaged was strongly biased towards the comparative approach, with the wording of the announcement pointing to farm surveys and record-keeping studies to discover factors influencing the profitability of farming. An approach was made to the Bank to see whether, in order to let the Faculty come into existence without further delay, this 20,000 pounds could be used instead to meet the salaries of a professor and a senior lecturer for an initial four-year period. The Bank consented on condition that the University would itself, thereafter, maintain the development and would provide some funds for research.

Those who chronicle the history of agricultural economics in Australia cannot fail to observe the crucial part played by the Reserve Bank's Rural Credits Development Fund. The Bank had already made a grant of 50,000 pounds to the University of Sydney in 1948 to establish the first Chair of Agricultural Economics in Australia. Grants had also been made to the University of Western Australia to establish a temporary Research Fellowship and subsequently a permanent Readership in Agricultural Economics there. This vital support probably owed something to the interests of the Bank's Governor, Dr H.C. Coombs, Director General of Postwar Reconstruction when the BAE was established. Another favourable factor was, I believe, the presence in the Bank's



Rural Liaison Service of two of Australia's early agricultural economists, Alan McIntyre and Ira Butler.

Financial problems had thus foiled the University of New England's aspirations to be the first Australian university to offer a program in agricultural economics. By the time Armidale opened for business, major teaching and research programs were already operating within Faculties of Agriculture or Agricultural Science in Sydney and Western Australia and in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Adelaide.

Armidale's Chair of Agricultural Economics was advertised in October 1956 and I was notified of my appointment the following April. On my way up the driveway to take up duty in July 1957, I encountered the Vice-Chancellor with the Murray Committee and entourage in tow. Sir Keith Murray, a pioneer British agricultural economist, had been commissioned by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, to report on the financial needs of Australian universities - an important turning point in their postwar development, incidentally. He asked me where I had received my postgraduate training. "At Harvard, with John D. Black," I proudly replied. Sir Keith, Cornell trained, registered deep disappointment. "Pity!" he said.

Before my arrival, applications had been received for a lecturer/senior lecturer in farm management. To the astonishment of another leading British agricultural economist, who afterwards told me he failed to see why we needed a virtuoso in linear programming for the Colonies, we appointed Will Candler, a recent Ph.D. from Iowa State College, to the post. Will was to make an enormous contribution to the development of tuition in production economics and economic statistics during the four years or so before he departed to take up the Chair of Agricultural Economics at Massey. His total incapacity for diplomacy, his youthful impatience to set the world right and his uncompromising belief in the relevance of production economics principles even in university management ruffled not a few feathers. His particular *bête noire* was the University farm, which was subject at that time to some lack of clarity concerning its primary role. Some saw it as a means of reducing the University dining hall's dependence upon the market for its supplies of perishable foodstuffs. Will tended to see this function as inconsistent with its research and teaching

role. He claimed to have a supporter in the Research Fellow in Poultry Science who, one morning, found some of his experimental eggs being moved into consumption.

In September 1957, I recommended to the Professorial Board that tuition of the four-year degree course begin in 1958. This was adopted and confirmed by Council and in our first year twelve students enrolled for the course. Keith Campbell expressed some alarm at these numbers and spoke darkly of saturating the market. We were also pleased that the catchment area for the twelve included five states and the A.C.T. This encouraged our hopes of developing into a national and not merely a regional school.

It was said around the University campus that the only way of keeping anything secret at UNE was to give it to the Publicity Officer, Dr Eric Edwards. I know this criticism was grossly unfair as we were getting regular feedback from his P.R. efforts on our behalf - mostly letters from Keith Campbell complaining that our press releases were misleadingly suggesting that UNE had the sole distributing rights to agricultural economics in Australia. I also had to remind the Publicity Officer several times that I was not Australia's first Professor of Agricultural Economics. Apart from such minor over-statements, Dr Edwards did a commendable job for us.

We had few worries about over-supply of graduates. The New England course was not narrowly vocational and was designed to equip graduates for a wide range of careers both within and outside the agricultural sector. Both Jim Belshaw and Sir John Crawford had advocated course structures seeking to produce graduates, who were basically economists, with specialised training in the economics of agriculture and some emphasis on quantitative analytical techniques, rather than weak hybrids with a smattering of both agriculture and economics. It proved a sound approach. We were able later to supplement it with the postgraduate diploma course for those with a first degree in agriculture or rural science.

It did at the time, however, come in for some criticism from my former colleague in the BAE, Dr Tom Strong. Tom held that the only satisfactory way of training an agricultural economist was a double degree, super-imposing a course in economics on an agricultural science degree. He exchanged a series of letters on the subject with me in the pages of the



*Queensland Country Life*. After some weeks of this I was encouraged to receive a letter from Keith Campbell, informing me that he and several of our professional colleagues felt they could stay out of the debate no longer. They were coming in on my side. I eagerly turned to the *Queensland Country Life* next week. It carried a letter which began by stating that Dr Strong's ideas on the training of agricultural economists were even more dangerous than those of Lewis.

Eventually we were to be very pleased to merge with economics in the Faculty of Economic Studies. However, in the beginning, I'm sure, we moved faster towards the kind of course desired by virtue of our existence as a separate faculty. Universities are rather conservative places and academic developments are sometimes influenced by fears for vested interests. If we had started as part of an existing faculty, we might well have had to compromise far short of what an agricultural economist needs in order to have a working and not just a nodding acquaintance with his subject.

One expedient, which ran counter to all I had learned from John D. Black, was to establish for a time a separate Department of Farm Management. We realized that this could have been divisive and that it unduly compartmentalised staff resources. However, it was unavoidable if we were to achieve a staffing establishment commensurate with our teaching responsibilities and to enjoy a better ratio of senior to junior staff than was possible under the inflexible rule, then current, of one professor per department.

There was some headshaking on the Arts side of the campus on the arrival of agricultural economics. This concern was eloquently expressed or reported in an article by Gwen Kelly, wife of a Classics Department staff member. The article lamented the decline in traditional university values in Australia. It went on to ask (or perhaps merely to voice the ultimate disillusionment of university staff): "But what would you expect? It was the days of Agricultural Economics."

Incidentally I note that the academic Doomsday prophets are still at it. I recently had a short note entitled "Recollections of Agricultural Economics" published in the UNE's *Convocation Bulletin*. On the facing page was a headlined warning from the Professor of Classics, John Bishop, "Once a university yields to political pressure to introduce



'useful' courses, it is but a short step to the exercise of another and more deadly pressure."

My inaugural lecture in 1958 was entitled *Confessions of a Farm Economist*. Although it was extracted from me under duress I'm not about to recant and disown it. What it confessed was not my own misdeeds but simply the fact that in a number of overseas centres, agricultural economists enjoyed an unmerited popularity with their farmer clientele, despite frittering away their time in naive empiricism. Comparative studies, seeking to derive rules for successful farming by statistical agitation of data from farm surveys or record books, had proved a fruitless boondoggle, yielding little guidance to farmers as to what they should do to improve their economic performance. At New England, I suggested, we would do better to adopt a conditional normative approach using such tools as budgeting and linear programming, despite the fact that our grant from the Bank specified research to discover the factors determining profitability.

Moreover, I made clear that we would reject attempts to cast agricultural economics in the limited role implied in the normal physical and biological scientist's view of the agricultural research, development and extension process. In this view, agricultural economics is simply a form of cost accounting allowing those innovations which will pay the farmer to become certified practices for extension workers to peddle. The threat to agricultural economics perceived in the widespread currency of this viewpoint in CSIRO, departments of agriculture, research-funding bodies and universities themselves was what led me to select this uncharacteristic subject-matter. I have often wondered since whether in so doing I over-reacted to the preconceptions encountered on my arrival in Armidale. However, I confess that twenty-four years later I still judged it necessary, in briefing the ACIAR Advisory Council on the capabilities and strengths of Australian agricultural economics, to warn of the same misguided notions. Moreover, having since visited several underdeveloped countries, where the development of agricultural economics is held back by a preoccupation with cost surveys, wrongly purported to be a source of valuable farm management information, I am somewhat less ashamed of my inaugural lecture than I used to be.

Amongst other early teaching appointments were Rob Pearse, Eric Waring, Warren Musgrave, John van der Meulen,

Doug McConnell and Jack Duloy. Rob Pearce joined us at the end of 1958 to teach the introductory farm management course, encompassing farm accounts and budgeting and acquainting students with comparative studies. He and Eric Waring, who transferred across from the Agronomy Department in 1960, encouraged, and developed links with, local farm-improvement clubs. They were jointly responsible for launching the University's Farm Management Service Centre, the forerunner to the Agricultural Business Research Institute. Rob also promoted the development of standard farm accounting conventions and took the initiative in securing the grant for a temporary Research Fellowship in this field from the Rural Credits Development Fund.

Jack Duloy was originally appointed to teach agricultural economics but assumed responsibility for economic statistics in order to maintain tuition in this subject after Will Candler's departure. Whereas Will had a sizeable dose of experimental design in the course, Jack gradually shifted the emphasis towards econometrics.

John van der Meulen taught the first course offered at New England in agricultural marketing. It incorporated a strong strand of demand analysis. Van der Meulen was instrumental in obtaining funds for a research fellowship in banana marketing from the Banana Growers Federation. He also took it on himself to conduct an appeal amongst agribusiness firms and financial institutions to obtain the funds to purchase journals and monographs for the Faculty's Seminar Library.

At a conference in Coffs Harbour conducted by the University's Department of Adult Education, van der Meulen revealed that the main content of a 15,000 pounds report from the BGF's consultants was already available free of charge in an article of his published in the *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics* some time previously. He rather warmed to his subject and I heard the Chairman of the BGF behind me say somewhat apprehensively "He'll be on about the new case next."

At that moment van der Meulen roared "And as for the new case, it's a disaster." It appeared that on switching from timber to paperboard cases, the BGF had chosen one retaining the same dimensions as the old wooden case, whereas the new material really called for a marked reduction in the height of



the side walls so as to allow stacking without bruising of the fruit and to provide an attractive display case at point of sale. Fortunately the BGF was a body with a long-standing interest in marketing and a firm belief in the benefits of research. They generously gave us our grant.

Warren Musgrave is best known to former students for his rigorous presentation of the core course in production economics for many years and for a critical evaluation of linear programming in senior years. He subsequently demonstrated the value of a sabbatical year in Michigan by attracting a million dollar grant to establish the Rural Adjustment Unit.

I'm going to desist at this point and not outline the many contributions of other members of the teaching staff such as Ross Parish, who was appointed Associate Professor in 1963, John Dillon, who came as Foundation Professor of Farm Management the following year, Ian Sturgess, who took over Parish's course in agricultural marketing, or Tak Takayama, our first Professor of Economic Statistics. Nor do I have time to describe the work of the early research fellows including Bernard James, Alistair Watson and Tony Chisholm or the numerous others who served as research assistants and teaching fellows. I can merely mention but not review the achievements and contributions of the many other members of the teaching staff who helped the Department to win and uphold its standing in the Australian profession and overseas - such men as Gwyn James, Roy Powell, Jack Sinden, Brian Hardaker, Jack Makeham and Jock Anderson, none of whom are exactly newcomers to Armidale.

The Department also had a number of distinguished visitors who contributed to its development during its early years. Bill Herr from the University of Southern Illinois spent two years with us in the early 1960s. Maurice Kelso taught our first course in natural resource economics. Al Halter helped John Dillon identify New England with decision-making studies and Barry Dent found a receptive audience here for systems analysis.

One man I must mention, however, is Arthur Rickards, whose entrepreneurial capacity, salesmanship and computing skills put ABRI on an efficient self-sustaining basis after previous difficulties in getting it up and going. Another is John Quilkey, originally Research Fellow in Rice Marketing



but soon pressed into substantial teaching duties, including supervision of the final-year Research Seminar, a unit important in making New England graduates ready to go out as practitioners.

Finally, of course, it is imperative to acknowledge the great contribution of our support staff. Mrs Joan Plumley, departmental secretary for many years used to help me into my gown and impel me in the direction of the lecture room when it was time for me to be on my way. I resisted this only once. "I can find my way into my gown, myself," I snapped. "I'm not quite doddering yet." The following day she burst in about twenty minutes after my appointment with my students was due to begin and affected great surprise. "Oh! I thought you were away lecturing," she said. I grabbed my gown and raced across to the lecture room, only to see the last of the class disappearing over the hill on their way back to the Union.

From the beginning the Seminar Library was an extremely valuable teaching resource. It also afforded students a quiet, congenial place to work between classes. While funds for journal subscriptions and other accessions had to come from external sources, the University generously added a library assistant to our staffing establishment. That the Seminar Library served us so well in those early days was due largely to the enthusiasm and helpful personalities of its successive custodians, Miss Ilona Eberle, Mrs Phil Hughes and Mrs Pat Eberle.

For some years after its establishment, the Department's physical facilities and staff study accommodation were rather cramped and inadequate. My wife and I once used to sail a four-berth cruising yacht off the South Coast of England. An unkind reviewer once wrote of it: "This vessel offers comfort for one, intimacy for two, tenseness for three and bitter hostility for four." Well all I can say is that compared to the initial quarters of the Faculty of Agricultural Economics, the accommodation on that boat was palatial. For the first year or so Will Candler and I shared a tiny room in the temporary Rural Science hut with the Physiology Department's white mice, which I personally found less distracting than a room-mate pounding away at a Simplex solution on an ancient Marchant calculator. Our research assistant, Tom Harris, and the BAE postgraduate scholar that year, Peter Dixon, were housed nearby in an unlined shed where rats developed a taste for the insulated power cables on their one-bar radiators.

By the time the Rural Science building, originally intended to include permanent accommodation for Agricultural Economics, was completed, the growth of our sister faculty had pre-empted all but five staff studies in the East Wing. These were barely sufficient to house the other members of our extended family, namely the teaching staff in Rural Sociology, Economic Statistics and Public Administration. We did gain, however, a lecture room, seminar room and a small statistics laboratory.

Not until 1964 was the first stage of an Agricultural Economics building to be completed. A sum of 25,000 pounds for this purpose was included in the building program for that triennium. Even to get that much we had to resort to every tactic open to an infant department - wheeling, tear shedding, tantrums and threats to leave home. The actual cost was to run to about 40,000 pounds. It was to be two more triennia before the addition of two further small stages to the building enabled all outlying members of the Department to be brought in from Siberia. At the time we resented the view that there were more pressing things on the building agenda, especially the refurbishment of "Trevenna" and the indulging of ill-placed high-table aspirations in the College system, but although the capital grants for building increased greatly during this period, it was also a period of very rapid growth in total enrolments. Moreover, the destruction by fire of the Belshaw building in 1958 administered a major setback. Our hopes of securing an early improvement in accommodation sank with the news that, as the students put it, Belshaw had done his block.

Staff and graduate students, including those from related sub-departments, used to meet over coffee in a small room in the temporary office block west of Rural Science. It had no running water and a few cases of hepatitis sent us scrambling to secure a coffeebar dispenser with paper cups. A small refrigerator was successfully requisitioned by Jack Duloy as "indispensable for preservation of his computer tapes". I'm sure that sharing the one common room for all helped immeasurably in promoting good working relationships and in fostering the ideal of a community of scholars.

The location of the Agricultural Economics and Economics Departments on opposite sides of the campus at that time, did, however, present some problems. The lack of physical proximity tended at times to attenuate other links,



despite attempts to overcome the problem by such means as regular joint staff seminars.

Not surprisingly, much of the early research endeavour was directed to the economics of pasture improvement, the most important technological advance taking place in Australian agriculture at that time. Rob Pearse, Tony Chisholm and others worked on the capital stresses and stocking adjustment problems faced in carrying through a program of pasture improvement. Jack Duloy and Ross Parish contributed significantly to the appraisal of wool-marketing proposals in the run-up to the 1965 referendum of woolgrowers. Maladjustments in the dairy industry and the economics of irrigated crops also commanded considerable attention as did meat and banana marketing and wheat stabilisation.

In common with their colleagues in other universities, New England's agricultural economists were not noted at this time for a low profile on controversial issues of public policy. There was never, however, any attempt on the part of the University authorities to curb this involvement. I once met the Chancellor, Dr P.A. Wright, in Beardy Street. He said "I see you've had a mention in *Queensland Country Life*. Keep up the good work; its all good publicity." I was taken aback later to discover he had been referring to an attack on me in which my adversary alleged that "the old professor was hopelessly muddled, incompetent and confused." Incidentally I wrote off at once objecting to that epithet "old".

On another occasion the Vice-Chancellor, Bert Madgwick, carpeted me for becoming involved during his absence in a front-page disagreement on university finance with Senator John Gorton, then Commonwealth Minister in charge of Education. "Never do that again," said Dr Madgwick, "but if you must, talk to me first. I could have helped you." Such incidents indicated that fears about the erosion of traditional university values, arising from the insidious influence of agricultural economics, may have been somewhat misplaced.

Another feature of life in the Department's early existence was our participation in university extension activities. This involved staff in some hair-raising travel on indifferent roads. We had tried hard to get our lecturers not to face the blackboard when addressing the class; it was a little disconcerting to find some of them adopting the same



stance in relation to their back-seat passengers. I've been reminded recently of my occasional departure from impassivity as a passenger: Bernard James claims that, despite my prediction he'd be lucky not to write off his car in six months on Australian dirt roads (an opinion expressed after sharing an 180-degree skid with him), his experience on the far more demanding snow-covered roads of East Anglia has served him well and he's still driving his own panel van with 200,000 miles behind him.

There were other dangers on these trips. I recall travelling to a Rural Science School at Wellington with Eric Waring and a couple of rural scientists. Eric confessed he hadn't yet worked out what to say beyond his opening joke. He was prevailed upon to tell this. Then to Eric's utter dismay, one of his rural scientist companions, who preceded him on the program, stood up and commenced his presentation with the joke. It only goes to show that Cornell-trained economists are not the only people never to be trusted.

I regret in these recollections I haven't said much about the undergraduate students. If I get started on anecdotes about students, I might not know where to stop. The Department certainly attracted some very anecdote-worthy individuals.

A year or so ago I had a discussion with Warren Musgrave in which we speculated how the Department of Agricultural Economics at New England had come to succeed so far beyond all early expectations and had won for itself such an enviable reputation in Australia and overseas. Warren hypothesised, and I had to concur, that the main reason was simply sheer good fortune in the students who came to us. If you look back at the composition of the classes we had in those early days, and trace their postgraduate careers, the conclusion is inescapable that the intake must have been significantly different in some important respects from the average university entry.

The student body in each faculty of a university tends to shape its own behaviour code and set of values to a large extent independently of the staff. The group attitudes which grew up amongst Ag Eco students at Armidale led them at times to play rather hard (despite the examples of their mentors). It somehow did not impede the development of a professional pride, a sense of purpose and a confidence in their

own capacity, at a minimum, to cope as well as their instructors. The high standing of the Department undeniably stems mainly from the impact of its graduates.

For staff members, those years were an exciting and intensely fulfilling experience. I've been lucky enough twice in my career to be around when a new institution in agricultural economics was launched. The first was the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Canberra after the War. In both cases staff members felt they were engaged in doing something very worthwhile, which lightened any temporary frustrations or difficulties experienced. They were still well down the learning curve, where *deja vu* and red tape had not yet been encountered.

I'm glad I was there in the first decade of the Department. Notwithstanding attempts in some quarters to suggest that while all this early action was taking place, I was far away raising goats in the Punjab, I was indeed there. I'm also glad that throughout those formative but sometimes difficult years, the Department continued to receive the unwaiving support of its founder - the man who conceived the whole idea, who campaigned for many years to see it born, and who earlier from 1938 onwards had also pioneered economics at the New England University College.