

In Memoriam—Stacey Ward Cole '41

Farmer, politician and ardent supporter of the Thompson
School

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Stacey Cole's resonant voice fell silent on November 30, 2014, when he passed away at Red Crow Farm, his home in West Swanzey, N.H. He had owned and operated the farm since 1941, which at one point boasted 46 head of cattle, 5,000 laying hens, and several pigs. Cole had a soft spot for all animals, including a newborn lamb rejected by

its mother. Rescued by his wife Mildred and named “Jennifer,” the lamb had the run of the couple’s living room and was fond of sitting in Cole’s lap.

The farm program director at WKNE Radio Corp. for more than 20 years, Cole hosted a daily program called “Down on the Farm.” Stephen Taylor ’62, former N.H. state commissioner of agriculture, treasures a childhood memory of Cole’s “great radio voice” as he mused about his animals, happenings at Red Crow Farm and the changing seasons. Years later, Cole served on the State Agricultural Advisory Board when Taylor was commissioner.

Cole also wrote a column, “Nature Talks,” for the New Hampshire Union Leader from 1962 until his death, and gave public talks about the natural world. He was especially enthusiastic and knowledgeable about birds. “Even if you didn’t give a hoot about birds, you would after going to just one of his lectures,” says Taylor. In 2013 Cole wrote a book, *Stacey Cole’s New Hampshire*, a compilation of essays about the state’s natural history.

A staunch Republican, Cole was a member of the N.H. House of Representatives from 1965 to 1967, and again from 1989 to 1996, serving as deputy speaker for three years. He became known as someone with strong political beliefs, but one who never let them stand in the way of getting things done, says Taylor. Six New Hampshire governors appointed him to committees and commissions ranging from the State Board of Fire Control to the Governor’s Commission on the 21st Century.

A graduate and an ardent supporter of the UNH Thompson School of Applied Science, Cole was a university system trustee from 1974-1986. According to Mary Louise Hancock ’42, who served with him as a trustee, when a new Thompson School building was dedicated in 1991, there was little question of what to name it. Cole was a lifelong farmer who had studied agriculture at the Thompson School and became widely respected in the New Hampshire agricultural world, so “It seemed logical that the building should be named after him,” she says. He was delighted with the honor, which included the Stacey Cole flower garden near the building. A popular common area and café within Cole Hall is also known as “Stacey’s.”

Associate professor and executive director of the Thompson School Regina Smick-Attisano met Cole when she arrived on campus in 1997. “He informed me each time we visited of the impact the Thompson School had on the path of his very successful life,” she says, and “wouldn’t hesitate to express his opinions and give me advice, which I graciously accepted.” A scholarship in Cole’s name was established in 1986; following Mildred’s death in 2000, he asked that her name be added to it. Criteria for the Stacey and Mildred Cole scholarship include “exhibited characteristics of motivation and promise, moral integrity and a sense of citizenship and spirit for the Thompson School”— attributes that Smick-Attisano says “sum up Stacey.”

Cole lived alone after his wife’s death, with help from a caregiver when his health declined. Stephen Taylor remembers that their final telephone conversation included, as always, jokes and laughter. His friend’s “orator’s voice” remained powerful to the end, he says, and when Cole’s noisy dogs misbehaved during their conversation, he didn’t

hesitate to bellow at them. “He was a rough-hewn, self-made Yankee,” says Taylor. “There aren’t many like him left in the world.”

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