

Donald J. Kays, 1886–1956: A Brief Biography

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Professor Donald Jackson Kays was Chairman of the Animal Husbandry Department of the Ohio State University from 1940 to 1951. Later, the department was designated the Department of Animal Science.

Professor Kays was a native of Illinois, born in 1886 and raised on large livestock farm in Putnam County.

¹Historical information sources are personnel records, news reports and proceedings of certain meetings on file in the archives of The Ohio State University. Statements of subjective nature are based on personal discussions and experiences shared by Professor Kays and the writer. Photo courtesy of OSU photo archives.

²Associate Professor, Animal Science Emeritus, The Ohio State University. Barnes was a member of Professor Kays' 1939 Livestock Judging Team. In 1947, Chairman Kays hired Barnes for the faculty position of Extension Specialist, Animal Science, with subject responsibilities in swine production and monogastric nutrition.

His first experience in the field of education came after attending the Northern Illinois State Teachers College at DeKalb, where he also was active in athletics. He taught civil government and beginning Latin at Rockford High School for two years (1906–1908). At Rockford High, he also coached the basketball team, winning 35 of 36 games and the state championships, outside of Cook County.

He had to return to Putnam County for the next two years to manage the home farm until his younger brother could take over. Don Kays then went to the University of Illinois where, after two years and a summer term, he completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Degree in 1912. He was immediately hired to come to Ohio State as an instructor in animal husbandry, which started him on a teaching career that was to run for 28 years.

He was made a full professor in 1914. His responsibilities included teaching the horse production and sheep production courses, management of the teaching herd of draft horses and the flock of sheep and coaching the livestock judging team. He determined that the livestock used at Ohio State for teaching purposes should include some individuals of a structural and performance merit that could stand open competition.

Working within the limits of a modest budget, he did succeed in breeding and producing draft horses that stood well at the Ohio State Fair and the Chicago International Livestock Show. Such winnings, however, he would attribute to the fitting and handling done by the Ohio State draft horse herdsman, the Scotsman Robert Watson, his long-time associate and friend.

Professor Kays' livestock judging teams competed in two intercollegiate contests each year, one held at the American Royal Livestock Show in Kansas City and the other at the International Livestock Show in Chicago. His teams topped these contests seven times, winning at the American Royal in 1930, 1932, and 1933 and at the International at 1921, 1932, 1933, and 1939.

He, himself, enjoyed a reputation as a capable and straightforward judge. Calls for his services in judging beef cattle or horses took him to 34 states and three Canadian provinces. The Canadians, in particular, valued him as a judge of gaited saddle horses.

Professor Kays was a superb communicator in both the written and the spoken word. He was a prolific contributor to farm magazines and breed journals. His textbook, *The Horse*, was a widely accepted college

text, and may have been the clearest treatment of the relationship between structure and function ever written. His "fun" book, *A Horseman's Scrapbook in Verse and Prose*, an anthology, is reminiscent of material he used as a popular speaker at dinners and inspirational events, or in his many assignments as a toastmaster. He also used available opportunities to demonstrate to students the importance of clear and fluent communication, oral and written, knowing that capability might be the most important benefit to be gained from their college experience.

As an administrator, he retained some of the motivation of the coach. Esprit and morale not only in the faculty and staff, but in the students, were important to him. Quality and merit in the teaching herds and flocks were factors. He had his most able and experienced professors teaching the freshman courses, which certainly eased the transition from the high school to the college level of work. He started the Animal Science Alumni Hall of Fame, which recognizes accomplishments of former students as an inspiration to current undergraduates. His was the third portrait hung in the University of Illinois Animal Husbandry Hall of Fame (1956).

He was a loyal member of the American Society of Animal Production and served a term as Chairman of its teaching section.

As a campus citizen at The Ohio State University, he served as a member of the Athletic Board, Board of Control of the Faculty Club, Stadium Building Committee, YMCA Board, College Committee on Instruction and the Entrance Board. He was a Mason and belonged to Alpha Delta Phi, Alpha Zeta, Phi Kappa Phi, and Gamma Sigma Delta fraternities.

If he was not born a teacher, he was born to teach. And he made of himself a great one.

Professor Donald J. Kays and his wife had four children. John taught Animal Science at the University of Missouri and the University of Connecticut. He revised his father's book, *The Horse*, and authored another, *Basic Animal Husbandry*. John resides, in retirement, in Storrs, Connecticut. A second son, Donald, worked for the New York Central Railway System. He resides in Newton, Massachusetts. Both daughters, Marjorie and May, were businesswomen. Mary now lives in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Marjorie is deceased.