

Sleeter Bull, 1887–1968: A Brief Biography

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Sleeter Bull was born December 23, 1887, in Sidney, Ohio, the only child of Broachy Tullis Bull and Lottie Sleeter. Sleeter graduated from Sidney High School and went to Buchtel College in 1909 (now the University of Akron). He was the first graduate of Sidney High School to attend college. At Buchtel, he had good grades, was a fraternity member, managed the football team, and worked in a men's clothing store. Sleeter then entered the Ohio State University, joined Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity, studied chemistry and agriculture, and received his Masters Degree in Agriculture. He and several AGR members visited the University of Illinois and founded what became the Alpha chapter of Alpha Gamma Rho during that year. Sleeter then attended Penn State, where he completed his M.S. degree in chemistry and biochemistry.

Sleeter married Lucille Simmons in 1911. They moved to Urbana when he accepted a position as

Associate in Animal Husbandry at the University of Illinois. Daughters Jean and Georgiale were born there. Jean became Mrs. John W. DeWolf and Georgiale married Edgar Furniss. They now reside in Reston, Virginia. Mrs. Bull died August 5, 1960, at the age of 71.

The professor's first years were spent teaching as an assistant in Animal Nutrition. Professor Bull changed his emphasis from animal nutrition to meats in 1913 under the influence of W. C. Coffey, who became Dean of the College of Agriculture and later president of the University of Minnesota. Professor Bull was named assistant professor of meats in 1921, associated professor in 1923, and full professor and chief of meats production training and research in the College of Agriculture and Agricultural Experiment Station in 1939. Professor Bull remained very active in teaching meats and other animal science courses until his retirement in September of 1956.

Professor Bull was much more than a competent faculty member. He was a legend, a picturesque personality, and a unique and delightful person. Once met, he was never forgotten. "Prof" was classified by his peers, at the height of his career, as a seasoned thinker, philosopher, raconteur, counselor of staff and students alike, and a great friend for those who knew him.

Professor loved people. His office door was always open and one never used more often. He wrote letters to his friends and students all over the world while they were in the service during WWII. People of all ages came to him for counsel on any problem and he gave of his wisdom and experience only after thoughtful consideration. His help to students who had problems was unstinting.

Professor Bull was in great demand as an after-dinner speaker. His humor, dry wit, and vast store of amusing stories and recollections were always appropriate. He was one of the University's most popular lecturers. "The popular professor taught his students not only, how to raise farm animals, but how to mind their manners and to dress appropriately."

Sleeter served Alpha Gamma Rho from his arrival at the University of Illinois from an office in his home until the time of his death. The professor served as Grand Registrar and Editor of "Sickle and Sheaf" in 1909–1910, National President from 1910 to 1917, and as Grand Secretary from 1917 to 1963. Upon retirement he was named Grand Secretary Emeritus. That

is the longest span of service of any officer for any fraternity. The coat of arms of Alpha Gamma Rho was designed by him. The fraternity seal, the charge of the fraternity, and the first "Sickle and Sheaf" (the AGR news magazine) were the work of the professor. The Sleeter Bull Award, named in his honor and established in the late 1950s, is given annually to the University of Illinois student who has done the most for the fraternity system during his college years.

He was named as University of Illinois representative to the Illinois Conference on Discriminations in Higher Education held in Chicago in 1955. Professor Bull hired the first black man to work for the University in 1945. This man was still working at the University at the time of Professor Bull's death.

Professor Bull's research in meats started in 1921 when he was named Chief of the Meats Division. His early research was done on a cooperative basis in interdepartmental and United States Department of Agriculture Regional Projects. He served on the Committees of the Cooperative Meat Investigations, which was reported in their publications dating from the mid-1920s to 1944. The two summer meetings of the Cooperative Meat Investigators and Meat Judging coaches in 1946 and 1947 led to the formation of the Reciprocal Meat Conference, which later became the American Meat Science Association. Sleeter Bull and I represented the University of Illinois at that historical meeting of 11 men on July 19, 1946. The Reciprocal Meat Conference, which had its first meeting in 1948, was usually attended by Sleeter until his retirement.

His research varied from chemical relationships to meat and animal production: the use of the spectrophotometric curve to measure beef color, exercise effects on beef quality, use of the wholesale rib as a representative of the beef carcass in determination of physical composition, the problem of dark cutting beef, freezing meat and its many problems during the era of locker plants, effect of feeds on quality of pork and beef, consumer studies relating local beef consumption to nutritive value and economy and grades of meat, and technologies related to processing and measuring the physical and chemical nature and quality of meat.

Professor had at least six Ph.D. and numerous Masters degree graduates before his retirement in 1956. His teaching in meats included courses in slaughter, cutting, carcass evaluation, and meat identification and preparation. The courses in identification and preparation of meats for the table became popular for students in Home Economics, and Professor Bull continuously supported the Department of Home Economics in cooperative research. He served as coach of the University of Illinois meats judging team before WWII, and those teams participated in intercollegiate judging contests at the American Royal Live Stock Show in Kansas City and the International Live Stock Show at Chicago.

His early publications were in the field of chemical relationships to animal products, by-products, and

feed constituents. These were presented in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* and proceedings of the American Society of Animal Nutrition and the American Society of Animal Production. He was the author or co-author of 15 bulletins and four circulars on animal husbandry and meat. The first edition of his book *Principles of Feeding Farm Animals* was published in 1916, and it was reprinted in the late 1930s and 1940s. Professor Bull also published many articles for the popular and farm press. His second book was titled *Meat for the Table*.

Retirement didn't stop Professor Bull's relationship with the University of Illinois. Following retirement he continued his daily relationship with what was known as the "Bull Ring." This interesting innovation was started when the Colonial Room of the Student Union was completed in 1941. Other professors and University officials, including the president and vice presidents, would meet for lunch in this dining room, and a large circular table was always reserved for them. It is reported that this practice still continues under the same terminology. Members regard it a privilege to belong. Sleeter believed that engineers and "aggies" (his term for agriculture faculty) were compatible with English majors, historians, and mathematicians.

Chuck Flynn said that members had to have a good sense of humor, wit and a tough hide, and to be solicitous of the others. Any overwhelming sense of one's importance did not exist within the brotherhood. When Russ Sullivan, newly appointed as dean of law, fidgeted and complained about slow food service, Bill Ferguson of mathematics suggested, "Just tell them who you are." The membership was strictly by invitation only. Self-appointed people who were not faculty members and the self-invited were given a hardly perceptible negative nod by Sleeter.

The Ring celebrated its 50th birthday in 1991 and still claims good membership, although few are left who knew its originator Sleeter Bull. Gardner quotes, "No one thought to keep records of early happenings, but complete accuracy is impossible, perhaps not desirable. As my Civil War Granddad always said, 'A lie well told is better than the truth any day'."

Sleeter Bull was a member of the Universalist Church, belonged to the Urbana Rotary Club, the Odd Fellows, Masons, Sigma XI, Gamma Sigma Delta, and Alpha Gamma Rho. He received the Signal Service award from the Reciprocal Meat Conference in 1956, the first Dean Fred Turner Award (later called Turner Greek Award) in 1961, the American Meat Institute Award for his pioneering work in meats, and was accorded the Honorary Fellow Award posthumously by the American Society of Animal Science in 1968.

The Sleeter Bull Meats Awards were established in his honor by the Illinois Association of Meat Processors. This award is given to University of Illinois undergraduate and graduate students who have

shown exceptional interest and achievement in meat science study. These two \$400 annual awards are given for scholarship excellence and depth of extracurricular activities related to meat. The Sleeter Bull Meat Processors Award, also established by the Illinois Association of Meat Processors, is awarded annually to individuals who have made significant contributions to the meat processing industry in

Illinois. The Sleeter Bull and Lucille Simmons Bull Teaching Enhancement Award has been established by Jean DeWolf and Georgiale Furniss. This award made possible by Professor and Lucille Simmons Bull's daughters was to provide annual teaching enhancement awards to the faculty with teaching appointments in the College of Agriculture, University of Illinois.