

American Society of Agronomy—Centennial Reception

Mark A. Carleton Remarks

First of all, let me begin by saying how humbled and pleased I am to be here and to receive this singular honor for my great-grandfather on behalf of the Carleton family. I am particularly indebted to Sara Uttech, Lowell Moser, Keith Schlesinger, Gary Paulsen, Steve Baenziger, Ellen Bergfeld, Vivien Allen, and Jerry Hatfield for their enthusiasm surrounding my attendance at this event and then for making my arrival here a reality. I have never felt more welcome or more like a rock star! Thank you all very, very much.

In his letter of invitation to me, Jerry made it clear that my remarks tonight were to be “brief,” and I intend to honor that request—mostly because my knowledge and understanding of Crop, Soil, and Range Sciences is relatively limited . . . despite Lowell Moser’s attempts to educate me in the last few hours. I will say this, however, as a way of contextualizing the importance of this honor and of giving you a picture of how much it means to me and to my family.

When I was growing up near the campus of Louisiana State University just up the road in Baton Rouge where my father was a history professor, my brothers and I used to enjoy aggravating him a little from time to time by using the phrase, “that’s history,” to signal the insignificance or impending demise of some program or person about whom we might be talking. I can remember watching football in Tiger Stadium and saying when a quarterback would get clobbered, “Boy, he’s history,” or watching an action movie in his living room when one of the antagonists was about to bite the dust observing, “That guy is history.” You get the picture.

Needless to say, my father hated this expression and let us know his displeasure every time we would use it in these contexts. Words to the effect of, “You owe history more than you will ever know,” or, “History is far more alive and dynamic than something like Sociology . . . that’s just conceptualizing the obvious.” Despite his entreaties to the contrary, of course my brothers and I continued to use this expression and continued to provoke his ire every time. However, as good sons we did eventually tire of this back-and-forth and decided to substitute another discipline in an attempt to placate dear old dad. You probably see where this is going . . . we chose Agronomy.

Filled with pleasure that we had acceded to his wishes and found another, less “significant” discipline to ridicule, I was elected by my two older brothers (somewhat suspiciously now in retrospect) to convey this decision to our dad. When I broke the news to him that we would no longer refer to all things dead or dying as “history” and would use “Agronomy” instead, I was shocked by his response, which was something like this:

“Mark, did you know that you are named for one of the world’s foremost Agronomists, whose devotion to science and love of exploration has helped to make this country great? Did you know he almost singlehandedly shaped the U.S. wheat industry and that there’s a movie about him called “Forgotten Victory”? Did you know that he’s influenced generations of scientists for almost a hundred years? And did you know that because of ignorant attitudes like the one you and your brothers are trying to pass off as humor, he died a lonely and isolated death in a country that was not his own?”

Whew! Did I mention that I was about 8 years old at the time of this berating?

Suffice it to say, our family is indebted to the tireless work of folks like Gary Paulsen, Lowell Moser, and others who have kept the life and legacy of Mark Alfred Carleton at the forefront of agronomists' and other scientists' minds during the last century. We are humbled to receive this award in his honor and to acknowledge the impact that he has made and is still making in this field of study. In our family, Mark Alfred Carleton's legacy lives on in our affinity for and attraction to the life of the mind and the "science" of lifelong learning. I am proud to stand in front of you tonight as a fourth generation "scientist" in the Carleton family:

- You already know my great-grandfather
- His son Roderick Lewis Carleton worked in the Agronomy field prior to receiving a Ph.D. in Political Science and was on faculty at LSU at the time of his tragic death in a car accident in 1938
- Mark's grandson and my father, Mark Thomas Carleton, earned his Ph.D. in history from Stanford and was on faculty at LSU for over thirty years until his death in 1995
- Finally, Mark's great-grandsons, my brother Michael Owen Carleton and I, have respectively earned doctorates in cell biology from the University of Texas and education from the University of Tennessee. Mike does cancer research for a subsidiary of Merck Industries in Seattle, and I am an independent school administrator in Rome, Georgia.

Mark Alfred Carleton's legacy in **your** field is recognized tonight and will continue to be recognized in perpetuity by this wonderful honor. I speak for my family by acknowledging with humility and gratitude the singleness of this honor. We are all very, very pleased.

Thank you again, and I suppose I owe it to my father to say now that my remarks and I are officially "Sociology."

All the best.

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<http://www.darlingtonschool.org/>