

# H.G. Baity

## A pioneering environmentalist

BY LINDA KASTLEMAN

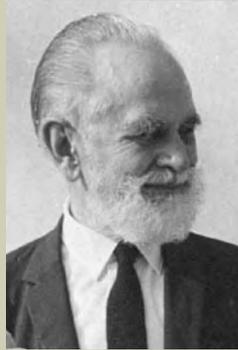
UNC SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH SANITARY ENGINEERING PROFESSOR DR. HERMAN G. BAITY WAS INTRODUCED BEFORE A SPEECH IN ENGLAND DURING THE 1950s AS "THE MAN WHO HAS DONE THE MOST TO INCREASE THE WORLD'S POPULATION."

"The audience howled with laughter," recalls Baity's son, Bill Baity, "but it is not entirely clear that they got the connection between his efforts to improve water supplies and the great drop in infant mortality."

Baity, who was UNC's second sanitary engineering faculty member, was so convinced that clean water was a public health issue worldwide that he fought to keep the department in the School of Public Health in Chapel Hill even when other engineering programs were moved to North Carolina State's campus in Raleigh when the UNC system was established. While on the faculty, he worked with the state's health department on clean water issues, and eventually became part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, bringing clean water and sanitation to people across the country. His work broadened. Soon, Baity became a world-renowned environmentalist, traveling throughout North and South America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa, addressing issues of water quality and wastewater treatment as a teacher, engineer and consultant to governments, companies and organizations worldwide. The School of Public Health has had strong global health roots since the 1940s.

Baity was born in rural Davie County, N.C., in 1895. While a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he worked closely with Thorndike Saville, a Harvard-educated associate professor of hydraulic and sanitary engineering. Saville saw the need to study North Carolina water resources, and he founded a number of organizations to promote safe water supplies to the state's

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Dr. H. G. Baity

towns and cities. Baity said that Saville's "ebullient enthusiasm and his devotion to sanitary engineering in the cause of humanity" had inspired him to enroll in the

two-year civil engineering undergraduate program, even though he already had completed a bachelor of arts degree. Later, at Saville's urging, Baity went to Harvard for graduate training and became the first person in the United States to earn a doctorate in sanitary engineering.

Baity returned to UNC in 1926 as a faculty member in sanitary engineering. While he was teaching at UNC, Baity also was an engineer with the N.C. State Board of Health until

Hill, N.C. State College in Raleigh and N.C. Women's College in Greensboro) under one administration, the engineering school was relocated to the N.C. State campus in Raleigh. Baity fought to keep the sanitary engineering section in Chapel Hill, aligning it within the Division of Public Health in the School of Medicine (now the School of Public Health).

As his focus broadened to global water issues, Baity became a consultant to the U.S. Natural Resources Planning Board and the U.S. Public Health Service. He and his family moved to Brazil for 17 months while Baity oversaw a public works project funded by the U.S. government.

From 1952 to 1962, Baity was director of the environmental health division of the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, traveling to Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa to address issues of water quality and wastewater treatment.

In 1962, he returned to teaching at UNC. He retired in 1965 but continued to consult with the U.S. Agency for International Development and spent a year teaching at the University of Tehran, Iran.

**BAITY WAS A WORLD-RENOWNED ENVIRONMENTALIST AND EXPERT ON WATER QUALITY AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT WHO SERVED AS TEACHER, ENGINEER AND CONSULTANT TO GOVERNMENTS, COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WORLDWIDE.**

1931, and from 1933 to 1936, he was North Carolina's director for Public Works Administration (PWA) efforts in the state. The PWA was part of Roosevelt's "New Deal."

He became dean of UNC's School of Engineering in 1932. When the state combined its three academic institutions (UNC-Chapel

Baity died in 1975 at age 79. The laboratory building on the UNC campus named in his memory is a fitting, if understated, tribute to this remarkable professor.

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