A key member of the Animal Sciences Department from 1946-1974, Dr. Howard Stonaker embodied the spirit of the land-grant institution through his work with local ranchers, helping them develop healthier livestock.

Stonaker was born on August 4, 1917, and at a young age, a love of animals was instilled in him. His father raced harness horses and he remembers “always [having] a pony.” He rode his pony all around Bedford, Indiana, where he grew up. He also learned the importance of work, starting in his grandparents’ greenhouse at age 12. They thought he would go into the business, but after high school, he enrolled in the animal husbandry program at Purdue.

His course of study wasn’t a surprise: “I really was a horse lover and animal husbandry was the nearest thing to that at Purdue.” He was the president of Alpha Zeta, the agricultural honorary society, and won a Chester White sow in a contest. To pay for her feed and care he worked at the swine farm on campus. After he graduated in 1939, he went straight to Iowa State to continue studying animal husbandry for his Master’s and Doctorate degrees.

As he was finishing his schooling, he knew he would soon be drafted to serve in WWII. He was deferred for six months during which an offer came from the head of the Animal Sciences Department at Colorado State University to come and work before he had to enter the armed forces. “I’ll never forget,” he says of his first moments in Colorado. “I stepped off the train in Denver, and that fresh mountain air – I remember that as if it were yesterday.” As a result of those months as an assistant professor at CSU, he knew he had a job waiting for him after his three-year stint in the Navy.

In 1946, after the war he returned fulltime to teach as an associate professor. He helped start a cattle breeding project and advised graduate students, with the goal of teaching them “how to do a better job of selection, and so on, in their livestock.” He formed ties with ranchers in Wyoming and aided them in breeding healthier livestock. One rancher was so grateful he donated his ranch to CSU. He won CSU’s Best Teacher Award. “I found I needed examples of every principle I tried to teach,” he explains. “I always felt that if I didn’t have a good example of what I was talking about, I didn’t get very far.”

Over his 32 years at CSU, he also served as the head of the Animal Sciences Department and the Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences. He published his research in the Journal of Animal Science, and was the president of the American Society of Animal Science. He was a Fulbright lecturer, at the Agricultural Institute in Allahabad, India, and the University of Cairo. In 1974, he retired from CSU, but not from agriculture. He continued to work in Colombia with the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) during the group’s founding years.

Affectionately nicknamed “Stony” by his friends, family, and fellow faculty members, his influence lives on at CSU through a scholarship in his name and the many people in the Colorado agriculture community and beyond that he helped.