

Wilfred Douglas Mills

January 29, 1895 — September 14, 1962

With the retirement to emeritus rank of Professor Wilfred Douglas Mills on April 1, 1959, and his death on September 14, 1962, the fruit growing industry of the world lost one of its most competent and respected advisers.

Professor Mills was born and reared on a farm near Tecumseh, Michigan. He entered Michigan State College in 1914, but his college career was interrupted two years later by military service on the Mexican border. Attendance at an officers' training camp in 1917 was followed by two years of active service in France. At the conclusion of World War I, he returned to Michigan State College, where he received the B.S. degree in 1920 and the M.S. degree in 1922. He taught botany for the two years he was there as a graduate student. He spent the summers as a field assistant on cereal investigations with the United States Department of Agriculture and as a state inspector of nursery stock.

He enrolled in the Graduate School of Cornell University in 1922 as a candidate for the Ph.D. degree in plant pathology. As a graduate student, he embarked upon an investigation of the seasonal development of apple scab and also served in extension as a special field assistant participating in the spray service for fruit in Nassau, Wayne, Oswego, and Ulster Counties. He was named instructor in 1926 and placed in charge of the fruit disease extension program at the College of Agriculture. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1930, he was appointed Assistant Extension Professor. He advanced to Associate Professor in 1944 and to Professor in 1949.

His high principles and intellectual integrity, coupled with a high degree of competence, resulted in significant contributions to the science of plant pathology and its application to fruit growing. To him belongs the credit for the development of an extension program in fruit diseases that is widely copied because of its high degree of excellence. That program was based on his precise observations in the field, his many field demonstrations that were actually exact experiments, his painstaking analysis of all available data, and his extreme care in the making of recommendations to growers. He won and retained the respect and confidence of growers because of his consistently sound recommendations and his accurate predictions of disease development; growers were quick to accept his recommendations and reluctant to change procedures unless advised to do so by Professor Mills.

His reputation, both at home and abroad, was greatly extended by his development of a chart relating severity of apple scab to periods of wetness as correlated with temperatures. Although the chart was based in part on the work of others, Professor Mills made his own investigations and applied the results to practical disease control.

The chart was so carefully developed that it has proved valid in a great many areas, including England, France, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands. The term, "Mills' Tables," which refers to the data on which the chart is based, frequently appears in European scientific literature and is used frequently in discussion among European scientists.

Professor Mills was a competent statistician and made effective use of statistics in the evaluation of his own data and those of others. His application of statistical procedures to complex data on fire blight collected over a 35-year period resulted in significant new information on development of this disease, even though the disease had been intensively studied by others over the previous 75-year period. The basic information brought out by this analysis and applied to control procedures has materially improved control of this important disease. A similar study of the virus-yellows disease of cherry added materially to understanding of the development of this serious disease under field conditions. Because of his carefully planned field experiments and effective use of statistics in the interpretation of data, he was recognized as a leading authority on field plot design. His reputation in this area led to his presentation of an invitational paper on the subject in 1958 at the meeting held in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the American Phytopathological Society.

His early promise as a scientist resulted in election to the botany honorary society, Seminarium Botanicum, while a graduate student at Michigan State College. His outstanding record in extension, research, and help to growers was recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture, which in 1955 bestowed on him the Superior Service Award. In 1959, the New York State Horticultural Society tendered him a special citation in recognition of his important contributions to the welfare of that Society's members as fruit growers. He was a member of the American Phytopathological Society, of Acacia Fraternity, and of the honor societies Phi Sigma, Sigma Xi, and Phi Kappa Phi.

Professor Mills was author or co-author of more than seventy research and extension papers. In addition, many mimeographed reports and extension publications based on his work found wide usage among research and extension personnel, teachers, and fruit growers.

Professor Mills is survived by his widow, the poet Antonia Ybor Schwab Mills, and by two daughters and six grandchildren. The loss of Professor Mills is deeply felt by his many friends and colleagues at Cornell and among scientists and fruit growers throughout the world.

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