

Karl McKay Wiegand

June 2, 1873 — March 12, 1942

Professor Karl McKay Wiegand, for many years Professor of Botany and Head of the Department of Botany, died on March 12, 1942. He had retired from active service on August 15, 1941, but was continuing research at the university and service on non-academic committees. He is survived by his wife and one daughter.

Professor Wiegand was born at Truxton, New York, on June 2, 1873 and grew up in this small town in the beautiful Tioughnioga Valley. The son of a pharmacist, he early became interested in the flora of that region, and the family's atlas of Cortland County has notations of the hills, valleys, and swamps he visited on his early expeditions. As a boy of fifteen he was already demonstrating interest and ability in the solution of problems in taxonomy.

He came to Ithaca High School to prepare for entrance to Cornell University and for training in his father's profession. The course in pharmacy was, however, abolished just before he entered the university and his interest turned to botany in which he eventually majored. His senior thesis was in seed anatomy and the quality of his investigation was such that it gained for him election to Sigma Xi.

After graduation in 1894 with the B.S. degree, he became assistant in the Department of Botany and continued study as a graduate student. In 1898 he received the degree of Ph.D. and the following year was promoted to the rank of instructor, a position which he held until 1908 when he went to Wellesley College as Associate Professor of Botany.

During the early years at Cornell his interests were diverse and included physiology and anatomy and morphology. His doctorate thesis was in physiology and at the time of its preparation he intended to continue study in that field.

In 1900 he began teaching in taxonomy and from that time his attention turned permanently to taxonomy as his major field of work. At Wellesley College he taught elementary botany and taxonomy until 1913 when he returned to Cornell as Professor of Botany in the College of Agriculture. At this time Dr. Liberty Hyde Bailey, then dean of this college, organized a new Department of Botany and placed Dr. Wiegand at its head. Within a few years this new department absorbed the Department of Botany of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Wiegand continued as head of the new department for twenty-eight years until his retirement. During this long period he wisely guided it and was in large measure responsible for its high reputation.

Despite the pressure of administrative duties, he taught large classes both in the laboratory and in the field and found time for research. He also built up from the beginning a herbarium of about 250,000 specimens and gave liberally of his time to the identification of plants for botanists from all over the country. Through his contagious enthusiasm for his subject and for the teaching of it, he developed in many students an interest in plants and an appreciation of the value of taxonomic studies in their practical and cultural aspects. When it was realized that Dr. Wiegand was soon to retire his courses became filled to capacity.

Dr. Wiegand always found time for research and published more than one hundred papers. His intensive studies of the plants of the Cayuga Lake region led to the publication of the "Cayuga Lake Flora" which he, as senior author, prepared in association with Dr. A. J. Eames. The excellence of this work has resulted in its general acceptance as a model of its kind. He made a notable contribution to horticulture by preparing for Bailey's "Standard Cyclopaedia of Horticulture" the extensive and technical "Synopsis of the Vegetable Kingdom" and assisted with the general introductory key—an important contribution of taxonomy to horticulture. He was recognized as one of the leading taxonomists of the world.

In 1933 he was Vice-President of Section G of the American Association for Advancement of Science and in 1939 President of the Botanical Society of America.

He has served the University on many important committees, notably the Arboretum Committee, the Committee on Campus Trees and the Committee on the Bailey Hortorium. He was chairman of the last two committees for several years, and to the work of all of these committees he gave much time and thought.

In 1923, in view of the large attendance of summer students in the biological fields and the richness of the Ithaca region in biological material, a Summer School of Biology was established under the auspices of the Summer School of the University and the Summer School of the New York State College of Agriculture. Dr. Wiegand was in large measure responsible for the initiation of this new school and directed the school throughout the eleven years of its existence.

Dr. Wiegand was a very modest man, unselfish in high degree. He viewed his administrative problems, as he did his research problems, objectively. He was always ready to forsake his own views when convinced of the validity of the concepts of others. His research was conducted with the utmost patience and marked by the most careful and intelligent procedure based on exact knowledge.

His quiet cheerfulness, his high ideals, and his thoughtful consideration of others endeared him to his students, to

all members of the department, to his colleagues, and to all who were associated with him. To work with him was an inspiration to all.