

Lemuel D. Wright

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Lemuel D. Wright was born in Nashua, New Hampshire in 1913. He received the B.S. and M.S. degrees in Chemistry in 1935 and 1936 respectively from the University of New Hampshire and a Ph.D. degree in Biochemistry from Oregon State University in 1940. His postdoctoral work was done with R.J. Williams at the University of Texas. He became an Instructor of Biochemistry at the West Virginia School of Medicine after which he worked at Merck, Sharp and Dohme from 1942-56 and became a department head. Between 1956-78, Lem Wright was Professor of Biochemistry in the Section of Biochemistry Molecular & Cell Biology, Division of Biological Sciences, and of Nutrition in the Division of Nutritional Sciences at Cornell University. In 1968, he spent a one-year sabbatic at the Max-Planck Institute at Munich, Germany. In 1978, he became an Emeritus Professor, but he continued to serve the University as the Graduate Faculty Representative for the Field of Nutrition.

Lem Wright was a member of the American Society of Biological Chemists, American Institute of Nutrition, Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, American Chemical Society, New York Academy of Science, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He served on editorial boards of *Analytical Biochemistry*, *Journal of Nutrition* and the *Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine*. He also served on study sections at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. In recognition of his research on vitamins and cholesterol metabolism he received the Borden Award in Nutrition (1958) and the Outstanding Achievement Award of the College of Technology at the University of New Hampshire (1970) and was named Career Fellow of the National Institutes of Health (1963).

Lem's scientific career began at the time of the exciting crescendo of discoveries of essential nutrients. First with R.J. Williams and E.E. Snell and later with collaborators at Merck, Sharp and Dohme, Lem worked out methods for the microbiological assay of numerous B-vitamins, including nicotinic acid, folic acid, biotin, and vitamin B-12, coincident with their isolation and characterization. During the same period of time he worked on the renal clearance of essential amino acids, and examined the metabolic interrelationships affected by these vitamins and amino acids in pyrimidine metabolism. He discovered biocytin and studied the interaction of biotin with the egg white protein, avidin. At the time that he came to Cornell, Lem began working on the biosynthesis of cholesterol and discovered the acetate replacing factor, mevalonic acid. This led naturally to studies of mevalonate metabolism and influences on the utilization of mevalonate for cholesterol metabolism. These studies were important in laying

the basis for understanding nutrient effects on cholesterol metabolism prior to the realization of the importance of cholesterol as a risk factor in arterial disease. Lem never lost his love for study of the B-vitamins, however. In collaboration with D.B. McCormick and students at Cornell, he continued work on the metabolism of biotin and of lipoic acid. This work remains the best characterization of the metabolic fate of these essential coenzymes in animals. In addition to publishing more than 155 papers in his scientific career, Dr. Wright edited with D.B. McCormick the six volumes on Vitamins and Coenzymes in the "Methods in Enzymology" series. Throughout his scientific career, Lem Wright combined basic biochemical studies with an interest in nutrition.

Lem was a man of strong quiet integrity. He gave scientific collaborators more than their share of credit, and had a work ethic which nurtured students by example. He combined a quiet demeanor, wry humor, and insistence on high standards. These qualities served the Field of Nutrition well during Lem's second "career" as Graduate Faculty Representative. His personal interest in students and his ability to make even those denied admission to the program feel good about themselves helped to build the reputation of the Cornell Nutrition Program to unparalleled heights.

When not in the lab, Lem loved to sail, climb mountains, and father stray animals. He was an avid ham radio operator. He will be remembered by all as a compassionate person and a productive scholar.

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