

Roger C. Pearson

September 8, 1946 — April 4, 1993

In his 20 short years at Cornell, Roger C. Pearson rose from research associate to become, as a professor of plant pathology in Geneva, the foremost expert on fungal diseases of grapes, not only in New York, but nationally and internationally. However, Roger is missed as much for his friendly, unassuming personality, as for his excellence in plant pathology.

Roger grew up on a peach and grape farm near Kingsburg in the central valley of California. He worked on the farm and also, in the summers of his undergraduate years, at the local Del Monte peach cannery. Roger enrolled at the University of California, Davis and successively obtained his B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees there. Of great influence on Roger's future career was the close and mutually respectful relationship he developed with his major professor, Dennis Hall. Dennis instilled in Roger an appreciation for the practical value of careful, in-depth research that was to be a hallmark of his future work on grape diseases. Dennis was an extension professor with wide-ranging responsibilities for vegetable crops in California, so he was also able to show Roger the methods and rewards of good extension. Roger's graduate research results on the black mold disease of tomato are still instrumental in protecting the important California tomato crop.

Roger came to Cornell in 1973 as a research associate in the Geneva Department of Plant Pathology and was stationed at the Hudson Valley Laboratory in Highland, New York. His responsibilities were primarily on tree fruits. He joined the faculty as an assistant professor in 1975. Two years later he relocated to Geneva and began his career as a grape pathologist. He was promoted to associate professor in 1981 and to professor in 1990.

Roger had statewide responsibility for research and extension on fungal diseases of grapevines in New York. He did pioneering research on the most important diseases of grapes caused by fungi. His research on powdery mildew, the most important grape disease in the world, gained him particular recognition. Although studied for more than 100 years, the powdery mildew life cycle was not properly understood until Roger and his colleagues demonstrated that spring infection of grapevines in New York originate from spores released from spore-producing structures surviving the winter in cracks on the bark of vines. This finding is revolutionizing strategies for control of this disease. Roger also discovered angular leaf scorch and grapevine yellows, both related to serious diseases in Europe, as potential threats to grape growing in New York.

Roger's daily activities and long-term goals reflected a genuine and abiding concern for the needs of grape growers to control destructive diseases. His basic research was always closely followed by an application of the results to improved disease management programs. He traveled extensively throughout New York vineyards during the growing season to talk to growers. A typical day during summer involved several hours of telephone calls from growers, managers, and even other extension, research, and industry pathologists to solve various disease control problems.

Despite the frequency with which he helped others, Roger was a remarkably productive researcher. He simultaneously managed research projects on biological control of powdery mildew with *Ampelomyces quisqualis*; biological control of downy mildew with fungal antagonists; epidemiology and control of powdery mildew, downy mildew, black rot, angular leaf scorch, grapevine yellows, Botrytis bunch rot and Phomopsis cane and leaf spot. The respect that this basic and applied research program was accorded by his colleagues and the viticulture industry is evidenced by the numerous competitive grants awarded to Roger by the USDA, the Sustainable Agriculture program, the New York State IPM program, and the New York Wine and Grape Foundation.

In addition to numerous journal papers and book chapters, Dr. Pearson co-edited and authored the internationally recognized *Compendium of Grape Diseases*. His commitment to producing an up-to-date, truly international, and comprehensive treatment of the known diseases of grapevine involved nearly three years of writing, editing, re-writing, arbitration between reviewers and authors, and hundreds of pages of correspondence. However, the end result was the realization of the goal: a high quality publication of great value worldwide.

Roger's authoritative knowledge of grape diseases was respected worldwide. He was named a research fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in 1982, and he was presented the Agway award by the Northeast Division of the American Phytopathological Society in 1990, and the Lee M. Hutchins award of the national American Phytopathological Society in 1991. In 1982, Roger spent a six-month sabbatical at the Biologische Bundesanstalt, Institut für Pflanzenschutz im Weinbau, Bfrenkstel-Kues, Germany, and the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique, Station de Pathologie Végétale, Bordeaux, France. In 1988, he spent a sabbatical at the Eidgenössische Forschungsanstalt für Obst-, Wein- und Gartenbau, Wädenswil, Switzerland.

Despite his success as a scientist and his genuine affection for his work, Roger's first love was clearly his family. He met his wife Karen in California. They have three children, Heather, 15, Adam, 12, and Alicia 7. Roger delighted in talking about their achievements, which are many.

His concern for others, his kindness, and his quality work were highly appreciated in his Department, at Cornell University, and throughout the worldwide scientific community. We have truly lost an outstanding scientist and a dear friend.

Thomas J. Burr, James E. Hunter, Herb S. Aldwinckle