

# George Lewis Slate

*June 27, 1899 — April 16, 1976*

George L. Slate, professor emeritus of pomology and viticulture at the new York State Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, New York, was born in Bernardston, Massachusetts. He graduated from the Massachusetts Agricultural College, now the University of Massachusetts, in 1921 and received his master's degree from Harvard University (Bussey Institute) in 1926. He joined the staff at the New York State Experiment Station in 1922 as a research assistant and was promoted to an assistant professor of pomology in 1928, to associate professor in 1945, and professor in 1951. He retired from the station in 1969 after forty-seven years of dedicated service to all phases of horticulture. Throughout his entire career he was responsible for the distinguished program of small fruit breeding at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station. As a part of his research program, he raised and evaluated more than a quarter-million small fruit seedlings, forty-one of which were named and introduced into commercial production. Many of these continue to be important in the small fruit industry of New York as well as of the eastern United States.

As part of Cornell's extension teaching, Professor Slate was the specialist in many meetings with New York fruit growers. With scientists, he was active in evaluation of the technique and the progeny of fruit breeding. With fruit growers and with scientists he was articulate and respected for his competence.

Professor Slate was a prolific writer, having more than six hundred published articles to his credit. Technical articles on plant breeding and genetics were published in the scientific journals and the yearbooks of the plant societies. He had a unique ability to convert his experience and research findings into language that was easily understood by gardeners and lay people and was well known for his frequent articles in farm and garden publications, including the *Boston Sunday Herald*, *Country Gentlemen*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *The New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Encyclopedia Americana*, *Horticulture*, and the *Reader's Digest Book of the Garden*.

Although much of his writing dealt with small fruits, his interests were much broader, leading him to grow, hybridize, and raise seedlings of many kinds of plants, particularly lilies in which he received national recognition for the new varieties which he produced. He was an avid gardener and grew large collections of many plants. His garden in Geneva was a great joy to him, where he shared his knowledge and his plant material with his friends and colleagues; many of these were visitors from Europe and elsewhere.

Professor Slate's society affiliations include membership in the American Society for Horticultural Science since 1922; the Northern Nut Growers Association, in which he served as secretary from 1943-45, president 1954-55, and editor of the association's annual reports for many years; and the North American Lily Society, an organization that he helped organize and for which he edited the yearbook from 1947-73. He was also an honorary member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, was an editorial consultant of *Horticulture* magazine, and was a corresponding member of the Lily Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society from 1948-67.

During his career, Professor Slate won numerous awards in horticulture, including the Mackson Dawson Medal from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1949, the Johnny Appleseed Gold Medal from the Men's Garden Club of America in 1959, the American Horticultural Society Citation in 1965, the E. H. Wilson Award from the North American Lily Society in 1960, and in 1968 the Wilder Medal from the American Pomological Society, which elected him president in 1973-74.

A year after his retirement, he was named a fellow of the American Society for Horticultural Science. In 1972, he received the James R. Jewett Prize for research on native American plants presented by the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. In 1974, he received the Merit Award from the Northern Nut Growers Association.

Next to lilies, Professor Slate's hobby interest was centered in old books dealing with horticulture. He was always on the alert to purchase the rare and unusual and through the years assembled a notable collection, some of them first editions of historical value. Books on birds and wild flowers were also included. Politics were also one of his interests; *The New York Times* and the *Congressional Record* were received regularly and clipped for articles dealing with his interests.

Although Professor Slate did not officially participate directly in the formal education program at Cornell, he was called on frequently to give lectures and conduct laboratories dealing with fruit varieties at Ithaca. His expertise in this area was unexcelled, and his colleagues frequently sought his opinions on variety identification and performance. Cornell students visiting him at Geneva were always welcome and received inspiration from seeing the amount and quality of his work. He will be remembered by his friends and colleagues as one of the outstanding horticulturists of our time.

Professor Slate is survived by his wife, Muriel Wilson Slate, a daughter, Barbara (Mrs. John R.) Abbott of Hilton, New York, and four grandchildren.

*Donald K. Ourecky, Nelson J. Shaulis, Laurence H. MacDaniels*