

Leon John Tyler

September 28, 1902 — May 27, 1988

Leon John Tyler had thirty-four years of professional association with Cornell University, from his appointment as a research instructor in plant pathology in the College of Agriculture in 1934, to the award of professor of plant pathology, emeritus, in 1968. His early work was with the Dutch Elm Disease, in a cooperative research laboratory at the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research, then located at Yonkers, New York. His efforts helped in development of a control program to reduce the spread of that disease.

Leon J. Tyler came to Cornell from the University of Minnesota, highly recommended by Dr. E.C. Stakman, one of the world's foremost plant pathologists and humanitarians. Dr. Tyler was born in Iowa, attended high school in Minnesota, and received the B.S. and M.S. degrees in agriculture at South Dakota State University. In 1930-31 he became instructor in botany at Louisiana State University and was highly lauded by Dr. C.W. Edgerton, chairman of that department. He entered the University of Minnesota in 1931 and was awarded a Ph.D. in plant pathology in 1934. During that period he carried out research on hybridization of corn smut fungi, and conducted field work during three summer months as leader in a state supported program for eradication of the common barberry, an alternate host plant for the dreaded wheat stem rust fungus. Immediately upon graduation, Tyler reported for work at the United States Forestry Laboratory in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he helped with a research program on White Pine Blister Rust in the Lake states.

Association with Cornell University began in the fall of 1934, in cooperation with the Boyce Thompson Institute in Yonkers, but by 1939 Dr. Tyler had become an assistant professor on the Ithaca campus, and gradually worked into a leadership role in the teaching of core courses in Control of Plant Diseases. Most students majoring in plant pathology over the period of 1939-1968 were in classes organized and presented by Professor Tyler. Early graduates remember the smell of rotten eggs in the halls as they prepared lime-sulfur in the laboratory, and the detective work necessary to find the unknown pathogens in samples of cereal seeds. Later students recall the studies of antibiotics and the de-emphasis of chemical protectants as cure-alls, as plant disease control moved into the latter half of the 1950s. All students remember Dr. Tyler's meticulous attention to detail in lectures and laboratories, and his insistence that they master the principles of plant disease control and learn to think with the facts which they accumulated. Candidates for advanced degrees under his direction were particularly appreciative of the friendly and patient guidance which he gave them.

Dr. Tyler contributed much to the research knowledge of small grains, working in collaboration with the Plant Breeding Department in the development of disease-resistant oat and wheat cultivars. He is credited with the discovery of three new diseases of wheat: dwarf bunt, foot rot, and stripe. Detailed studies of the etiology of these diseases led to new recommendations for control. In 1960 Dr. Tyler spent a sabbatic leave in Great Britain, Germany, and Greece, exchanging information and studying small grain diseases in those countries. His many publications attest to his vigorous approach to “practice what you preach.” His research and teaching activities were supplemented by participation on many scientific committees and by membership in many national honor societies.

After retirement in 1968 Dr. Tyler maintained an office in plant pathology and became the coordinator of news of the department via the departmental newsletter, *Phytopathology*, and local news media. Many alumni wrote to him regularly, and were obviously pleased with the tremendous job that he did in keeping them up to date with Cornell and the Department of Plant Pathology through an annual newsletter.

Dr. Tyler is survived by his wife, Iphigenia J. Tyler of Ithaca; a son, Dennis H. Tyler, of New Jersey; two stepchildren, James Atsedes, of Freeville, New York, and Sandra DiGiacomo of Ohio; a sister, Mrs. William Lind of Sarasota, Florida; and nine grandchildren.

Edward D. Jones, Arden F. Sherf, Carl W. Boothroyd