

Howe Symond Cunningham

November 2, 1884 — August 27, 1962

Howe Symond Cunningham spent his childhood in farming communities in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Nova Scotia, and he received a portion of his early schooling in each locality. As a young man he sailed with the Canadian Merchant Marine and with the Canadian fishing fleet. The lessons that he learned from the sea were an inspiration to him and to those with whom he shared them. Later in life, the sea provided him with much enjoyment and relaxation and with a place where he could commune with God and meditate upon his research and extension activities. To him, the sea was a source of strength and courage, and he captured its beauty and power in many beautiful photographs. It was fitting, indeed, that sudden death came to him on August 27, 1962, while he and his wife were bluefishing in Long Island Sound near their summer cottage near Riverhead, New York. Many of his friends and colleagues expressed this thought by saying, "It was wonderful that he died while enjoying his great love, the sea."

Although "Doc," as he was known to his many friends, loved the sea, he was devoted to his chosen discipline, phytopathology. He realized that man must earn his living by "the sweat of his brow," and, to make man's life a little easier and more enjoyable, he devoted his life to learning the truths of phytopathology and sharing these truths with his fellow men. His abilities were recognized by Nova Scotia Agricultural College, which awarded him the associate diploma in 1912, and the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture appointed him as its first district representative. While serving in this capacity, he attended McGill University and was awarded the B.S. degree in agriculture in 1917. In 1918 he was appointed Professor of Agriculture at Nova Scotia Agricultural College. After completing his work for the M.S. degree in agriculture at McGill University in 1924, he filled the position of Professor of Botany at Nova Scotia Agricultural College. In 1927, he became an assistant in plant pathology and mycology at Cornell University and received a Ph.D. degree in 1928.

From Cornell University, he went to Bermuda where he was the plant pathologist for the Bermuda Department of Agriculture for three years. He returned to New York in 1931 and served as Assistant Professor of Plant Pathology and associate in research at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva, while stationed at the Long Island Vegetable Research Farm in Riverhead. On April 1, 1946, his position was transferred to the Department of Plant Pathology, Cornell University. He continued research and extension activities at the Long Island Vegetable Research Farm as an Associate Professor until he retired on July 1, 1952. Following retirement,

he continued to serve the Long Island farmers in the capacity of consultant with the Long Island Produce and Fertilizer Company, Inc., Riverhead, New York, until the afternoon of his fatal heart attack.

His research activities covered the major disease problems of vegetables, including potatoes, on Long Island. He developed a spray program for the control of downy mildew of lima beans and helped lay the foundation for the development of downy mildew-resistant varieties. His appreciation of disease resistance led him into an extensive search for a source of resistance to black rot of crucifers. The decay of potato seed pieces caused large losses to the growers until he and Dr. Otto A. Reinking determined the causal agent and developed a seed treatment for its control. His studies helped establish the nature and importance of various nematode problems on potatoes. A better understanding of the effect of certain growth hormones on wound periderm formation in potato tubers was the result of one of his histological investigations. His researches into the histological relations of various pathogens to their suspects were classic examples of his exacting approach to fundamental research. He realized that methods of disease control were of little value until growers understood how to use them properly, and he spent much time teaching growers how to take advantage of research results. The results of his studies were published in New York State Agricultural Experiment Station bulletins and in various technical journals.

Dr. Cunningham married Margret Caldwell in Kentville, Nova Scotia, on September 16, 1921. She was graduated from Arcadia Ladies Seminary, Wolfwell, Nova Scotia, in 1905. She was a devoted helpmate and encouraged her husband to obtain his Ph.D. degree, although it meant considerable self-sacrifice. They had no children, and she is his sole survivor.

Membership in scientific organizations included the American Phytopathological Society, the American Potato Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge, and his activities in Rotary led to the presidency of the Riverhead Chapter in 1934 and 1935. The Congregational Church in the rural community in which he resided benefited greatly from his faithful and dedicated service as a choir member and as a member of various boards and committees. "Doc" and his wife were active in several community clubs, and they were noted for their humorous skits, which they willingly presented on many occasions. Photography was his major hobby, which afforded enjoyment to him and entertainment to others. He also gave valuable assistance to his colleagues in the preparation of illustrations for technical publications. Many young camera enthusiasts have become expert photographers as the result of the encouragement they received from him in camera clubs. He was an expert in handicraft, and he designed and constructed many of the pieces of equipment that were needed for his research activities and for his personal use. The latter included various types

of boats. Because Dr. Cunningham was always willing to give fully of himself, many sought his sound advice, and he will be remembered by all who knew him as “one of the finest men we have ever known.”

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