

## The University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin boasts a long history of plant pathology. In the 1880s and 1890s, William Trelease, A. B. Seymour, and E. S. Goff all conducted some research on plant disease, and in 1901 R. A. Harper and C. E. Allen each offered courses on plant disease in the Department of Botany. But it was bacteriologist Henry Lumen Russell whose determination led to the establishment of a separate department for plant pathology.

Russell, who had studied with William Henry Welch at Johns Hopkins and in Robert Koch's laboratory in Berlin, had himself studied plant disease as part of his graduate education—his doctoral thesis addressed bacteria with respect to plant tissue. He became dean of the College of Agriculture at UW in 1907 and immediately set about expanding the college to support Wisconsin agriculture. By 1909, he

had secured both permission and funds to establish a department for plant pathology, and he selected

Lewis Ralph Jones, then Professor of Botany at the University of Vermont and an accomplished plant pathologist, to be the first member and chairman of the department.

Russell's determination to start a new department in the College of

Agriculture set him at odds with

Harper and E. A. Birge, who

insisted that plant pathology should stay within the botany



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department. Russell held firm, and Jones became the first chairman of the new Department of Plant Pathology in the College of Agriculture.

Jones immediately set upon developing a strong curriculum that reflected the most current research in plant pathology. Many of the department's first Ph.D. students stayed on as lecturers and then became members of the faculty as they gained teaching and research experience. Their interests defined the department's research during its first two decades: epidemiology and control of fruit diseases (G. W. Keitt); diseases of vegetables, especially cabbage, onion, and others of economic interest in Wisconsin (J. C. Walker); and diseases of trees and ornamentals (A. J. Riker), in addition to Jones's own research. James Johnson—a plant pathologist in the Department of Botany—also contributed to the department's research and curriculum, and the “Big Five” shaped the image and reputation of the department for years to come.

Today, research in the Department of Plant Pathology at Wisconsin encompasses a wide range of questions, approaches, hosts, and pathogens. Since granting its first graduate degree in 1911, the department has awarded over 600 Ph.D.s and over 350 Master's degrees. The department remains committed to improving agriculture both locally and globally; as it approaches its own centennial, its members work, in the immortal words of J. C. Walker, “with one foot in the furrow.”

For more about the history of the Department of Plant Pathology at Wisconsin, see *With One Foot in the Furrow*, edited by Paul H. Williams and Melissa Marosy (1986).

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