

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
HISTORY OF PLANT PATHOLOGY

D. E. Ellis
Professor of Plant Pathology
North Carolina State University

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THE ORIGIN OF THE CARIBBEAN DIVISION
OF THE AMERICAN PHYTOPATHOLOGICAL SOCIETY +

by

Frederick L. Wellman, Chairman
Committee on International Cooperation
American Phytopathological Society
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Biographical Note by J. A. B. Nolla

Dr. Frederick L. Wellman was born in Portuguese West Africa. He finished his undergraduate studies at Fairmont College and his graduate work in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin in 1928.

He has held numerous positions in the field of Plant Pathology. From Assistant Plant Pathologist at Wisconsin in 1923-1924 he moved up the ladder to Agent, Pathologist, and Associate Pathologist, in the U.S.D.A. Bureau of Plant Industry.

Subsequently, he joined the Office for Agricultural Relations.

He was destined to play an important role in tropical agriculture. A stint with the United Fruit Company in 1928-1929, later acting as Assistant-Director of the U.S. Salvador Cooperative Experiment Station. Further on, at the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Turrialba, Costa Rica, where numerous Latin American students were trained by him in advanced aspects of research and techniques in Plant Pathology. Finally, Head, Department of Plant Pathology at the College of Agriculture, Experiment Station of Puerto Rico.

All these experiences have given him an unusual store of information on diseases of the plants of that area: the world, which he calls the Neotropics. His main interest is in coffee diseases.

Presently, he is engaged at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, in the preparation of a treatise on Plant Pathology in the Tropics. Publication of this work is impatiently awaited by all of us who work in the tropics.

Dr. Frederick L. Wellman had an important role in the creation and organization of the Caribbean Division of the American Phytopathological Society.

The first mention made of the necessity to create the Caribbean Division seems to be a letter dated July 14, 1959 from Dr. B. H. Waite to Dr. D. H. Raddler, United Fruit Company, giving details of the action

on the part of a number of Central American plant pathologists towards the establishment of a Section of the American Phytopathological Society for the Caribbean area. A copy of that letter was sent to Dr. Frederick L. Wellman, Chairman of the Committee on International Cooperation of APS. Finally, the idea was adopted by the parent Society at the Annual Meeting of the Society at Wisconsin in 1960.

The first meeting of the Division was held in Miami when its members met in a joint meeting with the American Horticultural Society, Caribbean Division in March of 1961. The Constitution was approved at this meeting and Dr. F. L. Wellman was elected its first President. As of 1968 and up to this date he is acting as Councilor of the Caribbean Division of APS.

Two Awards for Special Service to Tropical Plant Pathology have been received by members of this Division. This honor was first granted to Dr. Albert S. Muller and later to Dr. F. L. Wellman.

If you have lived and worked in some of the remote corners of the Great Caribbean region, you will realize, as most of us do, that one of the things we feel keenly is the tremendous amount of work there is and the lack of contacts with fellow plant pathologists. Here and there, in our corners, may be two or three working besides one another on plant diseases, but usually not.

Many reading this, know what it is to be far behind in knowing the most recent literature on some special problems. Sometimes what is read does not include all of the new difficulties encountered by the ordinary serious tropical plant pathologist. His is a profession in the process of unfolding; as a whole, it has few precedents and it is still a true frontier. Any day you may be attacking a totally new fusarium problem, or there maybe a previously unheard of kind of leaf spot. When the time of reports come and days drag slowly by while you grind out the results of your observation with sweat bathing an itching neck, you cannot help but wish to talk over the problems with someone else.

There is something surprising every day, new problems all the time. these are what you are under orders to study, these are of supreme interest, and these you are glad to grapple with. What do you do? With enthusiasm, hot days are spent in the field, materials are brought to the laboratory, and some are transplanted nearer home base for closer observation. With records in notebooks, one turns to old files of Phytopathology, to the "Revista" that comes from the Experiment Station in your country or from that of a neighboring land, you hunt through the Review of Applied Mycology, or sometimes find a suggestion in an ancient available work like Saccardo's Sylloge Fungorum. This is truly search and research. The work is all yours,

with no one else to argue about it. You are challenged to act as the equivalent of a great, complex, first class, buzzing department of plant pathology.

What is it that is most needed in our science of Plant Pathology in the tropics? I believe it is communication between us, and by that I mean speaking, voice communication, at intervals. In the case of our exciting race to keep plants healthy and to keep people from starving, particular phases of the disease problem depend on teams of workers, though, in some cases a single mind has to do it all. Whatever develops, we, who are the scientific workers, must know about it.

The quickest, the cheapest, the most successful manner, in which the largest number get the most value from research is through scientific meetings where contributions are heard and discussed. These meetings are of utmost importance to the practising plant pathologist.

As early as the 1920's, a few unplanned events in which several of us met together occurred in communication among tropical plant pathologists. I remember one in Honduras in 1929, one in El Salvador in 1943, one in Guatemala in 1945, and one in Cuba in 1947. Later, there was one major meeting of a planned sort in Guatemala for Caribbean plant pathologists, it took place in January 1949 and lasted more than a week. We had a magnificent time. Before this could occur we had quite a number of preliminary experiences. For example, in Costa Rica we formed what we called the Pathologists' Club. There were twelve to fourteen of us that met regularly every two or three months. The President had all the responsibilities. He had to preside to arrange the program, and to draw the discussion out of others. He furnished the meeting place and provided the refreshments. There were no excuses for absence and every effort was made to attend since if you did not go, the rest elected you President for the next time. It was diverting. We managed a lot of good serious discussion and a good deal of mutual help came from each evening. This lasted some years, but finally disappeared when many of the group moved or were transferred out of the country.

On a different level, and in a serious professional fashion, there has been formed a National Society of plant pathologists in Mexico. There is one in Argentina, one in Colombia, one in Peru, and one or two in Chile and Brazil. In those big countries there are advanced Institutions of Research. These Societies develop around them, meet once a year, have contributed papers, business meetings, banquets and elected officers. The discussions they hold, are of both international and local interest for their regional audiences. Recently they have established close ties among them with the creation of ALF (Asociación Latino Americana de Fitopatología).

In 1959-1960 another Society was formed, the now much respected Caribbean Division of the American Phytopathological Society. I do

not know what will become of it, but we hope it will be the carrying on of an unique group as the Caribbean Division of the American Phytopathological Society. Members will be at work on problems of diverse and special nature; from several tropical countries, using three or four languages. To begin with this International group was not large but it has grown, some day it may number several hundreds or a thousand or two thousand and it will be a highly interesting, stimulating part of the parent society. It will be made up of the important core of the most active workers in plant pathology in the Caribbean and contiguous areas. It is here where the challenge is. It is here where the future of our science is unfolding.

+ Footnote: This subject was originally written by Dr. Frederick L. Wellman under the heading: "Adventures among Caribbean Plant Pathologists" as a talk to be given in Miami in 1961. The present article is a condensation and a slight adaptation from Dr. Wellman's original manuscript.