

## Miriam Carpenter Strong, 1889-1969

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An indefatigable researcher for over 35 years on the nature and control of diseases of tomatoes in Michigan passed away on January 5, 1969. Miriam C. Strong, retired Assistant Professor of Plant Pathology at Michigan State University, died after nearly 7 years of debilitating illness

which kept her bedridden for the latter part of that period. Despite the extreme handicaps of her disease, Mrs. Strong maintained her courage and salty sense of humor to the end. To all her many friends and associates, her passing marks the close of the life of a cultured, delightful personality who was a helpful colleague and a true friend indeed.

Miriam C. Strong was born on May 22, 1899, at Lansing, Michigan. She attended Michigan Agricultural College, from which she was granted a B.S. degree in Botany in 1922. Following graduation, she was accepted as a graduate student in Plant Pathology at her Alma Mater. Her Master's thesis, dealing with the biological relationships for the identification of the genus *Fusarium*, led to her first publication, jointly authored with her major professor, Dr. G. H. Coons. Upon completion of this degree, she was appointed an Assistant in Research in 1924.

Competing in what was essentially a man's world of applied research on the efficacy of fungicides in controlling diseases, especially leaf blights of tomatoes, Mrs. Strong more than held her own with male plant pathologists and colleagues in plant breeding. Often the only woman present at meetings of growers, she presented the results of her research and recommendations for the use of appropriate fungicides in a very clear, no-nonsense, matter-of-fact fashion illuminated by an earthy sense of humor which enabled her to get the message across to her critical male audience. She was at her best in responding to questions from her listeners, who had learned over the years to consider her a dedicated, competent researcher who had thoroughly investigated the chemical compounds on which she reported. Moreover, since she had personally participated in planting, fertilizing, irrigating, spraying, and harvesting the experimental plots, she knew the growers' practical problems of producing a crop.

Indeed, one of Miriam Strong's goals in her fungicide research was to find ways by which a grower's costs of disease control could be substantially reduced. Depending upon ecological conditions, tomatoes in field plots

developed strong or weak epiphytotic, artificially inoculated, of early blight (*Alternaria*), *Septoria* blight, anthracnose, and late blight. Her meticulously planned experiments yielded reliable data on the efficacy of the newer chemicals and the comparative usefulness of tank mixes in reducing costs in controlling these foliage diseases.

In addition to research on the foliar diseases of field-grown tomatoes, she devoted a significant portion of her studies to the disease problems of tomatoes and other vegetables grown in greenhouses, an important industry in Michigan. Two mimeographed bulletins on controlling diseases of greenhouse-grown vegetables were prepared by her in 1947 and 1949. Thereafter, her efforts were directed mainly to damping-off and foliage diseases of tomatoes alone.

In 1940, Miriam C. Strong was promoted to Assistant Professor (Research), a rank held for the remainder of her career at Michigan State University. In 1928, she had married Forrest C. Strong (whose death preceded hers), who was not only a devoted husband but also a close associate in plant pathology in the same department. Their collaboration in research extended to mutual assistance in the field, greenhouse, and laboratory, since neither one had the services of a technician. Mrs. Strong published 35 papers and/or bulletins, primarily on controlling foliar diseases of tomatoes, in her professional career spanning 38 years. She was elected a member of the honor societies of Omicron Nu, Sem Bot, and Sigma Xi, and to the professional societies of The American Phytopathological Society, the American Mycological Society, and the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters. In 1943-44, fellow feminine colleagues elected her president of Michigan State College's Faculty Women's Association.

A life-long devotee of ballet, plays, and fine classical music, Mrs. Strong and her husband were invariably found in choice seats at the college's (and/or university's) concert series. Outstanding ballets, plays, or concerts in Detroit and Chicago also frequently attracted them. Yet they were avid and knowledgeable readers of contemporary literature. Furthermore, no one who had been invited to their home for dinner would soon forget the gourmet meals Mrs. Strong prepared and served.

In her passing, the department of Botany and Plant Pathology has lost a highly esteemed colleague, firm friend, and delightful associate. Her contributions to the control of foliar diseases of tomatoes, although perhaps not widely known outside of the State, were of lasting benefit to the vegetable industry of Michigan.