

## George Wannamaker Keitt, 1889-1969

D. M. Boone



George Wannamaker Keitt, internationally known researcher and teacher, died November 18, 1969, at Cambridge, Massachusetts. He had been a member of the faculty of the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin from 1913 until his retirement on June 30, 1959, and had moved to Cambridge 8 years before his death.

Dr. Keitt was born on his father's farm in Newberry County, South Carolina, on June 11, 1889. His father had returned there to farm in 1882 after having taught modern languages at his alma mater, Virginia Military Institute. In 1901, when George was 12, the family moved to Clemson, South Carolina, where his father re-entered academic life as a professor of English at Clemson College.

George Keitt entered Clemson and graduated in 1909. During his college career he was Editor-in-Chief of "The Chronicle", class orator, intercollegiate debater, winner of the Norris Medal for general excellence in scholarship, Editor-in-Chief of the yearbook "Taps", and senior class historian. Following graduation with a B.S. degree in agriculture and chemistry, young Keitt worked for a year as special agent for the USDA in the Georgia peach orchards. During this period he became interested in diseases of plants and decided to seek advanced training in plant pathology. He came to the University of Wisconsin in 1910, where he became one of the first graduate students in the newly organized Department of Plant Pathology. The M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in plant pathology were conferred on him in 1911 and 1914, respectively. He was appointed Lecturer in the department in 1913, and by 1920 had moved through professorial ranks to the status of full professor. Professor Keitt succeeded L. R. Jones as Chairman of the Department in 1930, and continued in this capacity for 25 years. Under the leadership of these two men, the Department of Plant Pathology became one of the chief world centers for graduate training, research, and extension work on plant diseases. Dr. Keitt was a Visiting Professor at Harvard in 1957-58.

Dr. Keitt's research included studies on epidemiology of fruit tree diseases, aerial dissemination of plant pathogens, stone fruit viruses, chemical control of plant diseases, and the nature of parasitism and disease resistance. He was one of the pioneers in the use of eradicant fungicides and antibiotics for control of plant diseases, and was a codiscoverer of the antibiotic antimycin which has been used widely in this country and abroad in basic physiological research. Perhaps he is known best for his genetical approach to the

study of pathogenicity, applying many of the techniques used with the saprophyte *Neurospora* to a combined study of the genetics, nutrition, and pathogenicity of the apple scab fungus, *Venturia inaequalis*. He was author or coauthor of over 200 scientific papers. Although his main research efforts were directed to basic studies, he also concerned himself with the practical problems of growers, and orchard fruit production benefited greatly from his activities.

For many years Dr. Keitt taught a course on diseases of orchard fruits, and early in his career taught courses on research methods and fungicides. He was deeply interested in the history of plant pathology, conducting seminars on the subject and contributing a chapter in one of the volumes of Plant Pathology, An Advanced Treatise, 1959. He translated the classical paper of Prevost on the "Immediate Cause of Bunt or Smut of Wheat" from French into English. This translation is available as one of the series of Classics published by The American Phytopathological Society.

Dr. Keitt was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a member of many other scientific and scholarly organizations, including The American Phytopathological Society, the Botanical Society of America, the Mycological Society of America, the American Society of Naturalists, the Society of Experimental Biology and Medicine, the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, the American Association of University Professors, Sigma Xi, Phi Sigma, Gamma Alpha, and Phi Kappa Phi. He served as Vice President of The American Phytopathological Society in 1934 and as President in 1937, and as a member of the Editorial Board of the Botanical Society of America from 1935 to 1944. Among other honors, he was elected a Fellow of The American Phytopathological Society, received the Certificate of Merit of the Botanical Society of America, and was awarded an honorary D.Sc. degree from his alma mater, Clemson University, in 1937.

Dr. Keitt exemplified the qualities of a gentleman. He was kindness, thoughtfulness, and integrity personified. His tactfulness and diplomacy were highly instrumental in maintaining harmonious relationships with colleagues and staff. He was meticulous in his research and precise in speaking and writing and exacting of his students, but gentle and quick to offer encouragement when needed. Forty-eight persons received M.S. or Ph.D. degrees under his direction; many later achieved key posts of responsibility in research institutions and industry.

He met Carol Seaver Keay at the University of Wisconsin, and the two were married August 30, 1927. Three sons were born to them: George Wannamaker, Jr., John Keay, and Alan Seaver. Mrs. Keitt, the three sons, and several grandchildren survive him.