

## Robert W. Goss, 1891-1970

Max L. Schuster

Department of Plant Pathology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln 68503.

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Robert Whitmore Goss, guiding light during the early years of the modern program of the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Nebraska, passed away suddenly on January 10, 1970. Born in Fall River, Massachusetts, May 28, 1891, he attended public schools there, later enrolling at Michigan State University, where he earned a

B.S. degree in 1914 and an M.S. degree in 1915, then obtaining his doctorate in Plant Pathology in 1923 at the University of Wisconsin. At the time of his death, Dr. Goss was Professor Emeritus of Plant Pathology and former Dean of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska.

In 1920, Dr. Goss assumed an instructorship in Plant Pathology at Nebraska. As an instructor, his policy was to apply strict requirements at the beginning of his courses. Dr. Goss felt this technique eliminated the laggards. His high regard for remaining students was evidenced by giving oral examinations individually to each one after every laboratory exercise.

Dr. Goss had an innate interest in the principles of science, but also a driving desire to explore their practical applications. His investigations were almost entirely devoted to horticultural crops, with particular emphasis on potatoes. Evidences of his research ability are the significant contributions to the Nebraska seed potato industry. His work on two *Fusarium* wilts was classical in demonstrating that *F. eumartii* was the cause of most of the *Fusarium* wilt occurring in western Nebraska, which, as well as *Streptomyces scabies*, was indigenous to most western Nebraska soils. He contributed much to the clarification of the seed potato degeneration problem in western Nebraska. That the spindle tuber virus was spread among seed potatoes by cutting knives and picker planters and from plant to plant by grasshoppers was a discovery of great value in the early days of certification. Dr. Goss, according to H. O. Werner, Horticulture, visualized the necessity and participated actively in starting the potato-breeding program in Nebraska.

As a member of seed certification in Nebraska from 1920-1940, he was highly respected by the people of the potato industry. He had the knack of making complex diseases comprehensible to the layman. Explanations for the need of rigid regulations to meet certification standards made applications by inspectors in the field much simpler. He was gifted with a dry

New England wit that aided him in gaining the confidence of farmers and associates. In spite of his urban background, he exhibited much sympathetic discernment for practical farm problems. His associates were amused at tracing his travels among western Nebraska potato growers by hearing them refer to the two major diseases as "Fusariar and Rhizoctoniar."

Dr. Goss served as Chairman of the Plant Pathology Department from 1937 to 1948. His deep interest to his chosen profession never wavered despite his other duties. He laid the foundation for a sound program of teaching, research, and public service in the department, and helped greatly in raising standards in the entire University.

His ability to deal with students and staff was well recognized and, in part, contributed to his appointment as the first full-time Dean of the Graduate College. In this capacity, he initiated the University Research Council and strove to acquire funds for staff members of departments with few or no funds for research. Dean Goss laid the foundation for sound operational procedures in the Graduate College, most of which are still in operation. He was not given to hasty decisions; new ideas were carefully considered and given thorough study. "Well done" was the goal of his efforts.

No one questioned his scientific integrity in his published works, but at social functions he could occasionally tell a good story. At public meetings he was not inclined to start a controversy but at technical gatherings his occasional sophisticated and frequently humorous sarcasm would clarify tangled situations. Perhaps one of the best ways to depict this characteristic for spurious ideas is to consider him as a "cynic" in the nonpejorative meaning; that is "one who taught that virtue is the only good and that its essence lies in self control and independence". The New England wit was demonstrated while at a technical meeting in Louisiana. He was hard pressed for an opinion as to how to compare the State Capitol in Louisiana with that of Nebraska. After explaining the great similarity, he stated that the searchlights were projected upward to illuminate the "Sower" on top of the Nebraska's tower while in Louisiana the searchlights were directed downwards from the top of the tower to shine on Huey Long's grave. *Satis verborum!*

Dr. Goss was an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa, a Fellow of AAAS, a member of Sigma Xi, Phi Sigma, AAUP, and APS, a recipient of the Gamma Sigma Delta distinguished service award in agriculture, and Vice-President of APS in 1938.