

George Herman Starr, 1898-1982

George H. Bridgmon



Dr. G. H. Starr died November 13, 1982, after a hard-fought battle with cancer. He succumbed at the hospital near his retirement home in Fort Collins, CO.

He was born on a farm near Bismarck, IL, but moved to Lane, SD, when he was a small boy. His secondary education was completed at the high school in Mitchell, SD, in 1918. After high school he attended South Dakota State College at Brookings and graduated with a B.S. in 1925 with a major in agronomy and

a minor in horticulture. In the summers during his college years, he worked for the USDA early in its barberry eradication program.

He married Meriel Louise Spooner with whom he became acquainted because they were alphabetically seated at the daily convocation in college. They both taught school for a few years after graduation at locations close enough so their college romance could continue.

With his lovely wife's support, he completed his Master of Science degree in 1928 at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln with a major in horticulture and a minor in botany. His Ph.D. was completed in 1931 at the University of Minnesota under the guidance of Dr. J. G. Leach. He majored in plant pathology and minored in horticulture.

After graduation, Dr. Starr accepted a plant pathology teaching, extension, and research position at the University of Wyoming and the Wyoming Agricultural Experiment Station. For many years he was the only plant pathologist on the university and station faculty. Thus began many years of service to his discipline, college, and university. He served on 14 university committees, at least four college committees, and as an advisor to Alpha Zeta, an agriculture fraternity, for nearly 20 years.

He authored and coauthored more than 60 publications in plant pathology and agriculture. Many of these were on potato and bean diseases, two significant cash crops in Wyoming. A number of publications on potato ring rot were coauthored with friend and colleague, Dr. William A. Riedl, also trained at Minnesota, who was the station agronomist and plant breeder in charge of seed

certification. This team contributed significantly to the Wyoming Crop Improvement Association, seed certification, and to Wyoming Pure Foundation Seed. Dr. Starr led the program for producing blight-free bean seed during the war years when many acres of snap bean seed were grown in Wyoming for the seed trade and the many Victory gardens that proliferated during and after World War II.

During his active years as a plant pathologist, Dr. Starr stimulated the scientific and teaching careers of many plant pathologists by exhibiting exceptional enthusiasm for the discipline as he supervised their graduate training.

Besides his university service, he was also active in his church, the Kiwanis Service Club, the community, and state.

In 1952, a search for the best possible individual with the proper extension philosophy brought an invitation to Dr. Starr to accept the position of director of agricultural extension for the University and State of Wyoming. He accepted the position and served for many more years at national, state, and local levels. Committee service during this period included: Hoblitzelle Agriculture Award Committee; National Fertilizer Steering Committee; Great Plains Agriculture Council (chairman); Northern Great Plains Agriculture Council (chairman); State Soil Conservation Committee; three different governor's committees on older workers, aging, and higher education; Western Extension Directors (chairman); National Potato Certification Committee; American Phytopathological Society Publicity Committee; Intermountain Phytopathologists; and many others.

Dr. Starr retired in 1964 after 33 years of service to the university, state, and nation and later accepted recall to the Department of Plant Pathology to fill in during the absence of other plant pathologists when they were on leave.

Dr. Starr was always enthusiastic, always a gentleman, and above all spent his life thinking of others. A short move to Fort Collins, CO, brought him and Meriel closer to their son, Dr. Robert I. Starr and his wife and children. A life of service continued in his new home in Fort Collins.

We will long remember George Herman Starr, not for the honors he received, which were many, or even his exceptional service to others, but for his friendliness to everyone, his philosophy of life, and his personal integrity. We knew him, loved him, and were inspired by him. The memories did not and will not pass away.