

## William H. Muir, 1928–1985

John H. Hill and James L. Van Etten



William H. Muir was born on May 26, 1928, and grew up in Meadville, PA. He obtained his B.S. in biology from Allegheny College in 1949 and his M.A. in biology in 1951 from The Johns Hopkins University. He completed his Ph.D. in plant pathology at the University of Wisconsin in 1955 under the direction of professors A. C. Hildebrandt and A. J. Riker. As a graduate student he was the first person to grow plant tissue cultures from single cells; he did this with both marigold and tobacco cells.

Dr. Muir joined the faculty of Carleton College, in Northfield, MN, as an assistant professor of botany in the Department of Biology in 1957. He spent his entire professional career at Carleton College, becoming a full professor in 1966. He served as chairman of the Biology Department from 1964 to 1969. During much of Dr. Muir's career, he was responsible for teaching all the botany courses at Carleton College. Dr. Muir had an outstanding ability to motivate students. He continually drew attention to the mysteries of botany and encouraged undergraduate students to conduct research, which, in some instances, led to published papers. His interest in undergraduate students plus his charismatic enthusiasm for teaching the botanical sciences were directly responsible for at least 19 students pursuing graduate degrees in plant pathology. Indeed, 0.5% of the registrants attending the 72nd Annual Meeting of the American Phytopathological Society in Minneapolis in 1980 were graduates of Carleton who were directly influenced by Dr. Muir. These former students hold faculty positions in plant pathology departments at institutions such as Cornell University, University of California, Iowa State University, University of Nebraska, and University of Maine. Additionally, Dr. Muir influenced about 50 other students who

have academic, industrial, and business careers in almost every discipline of botany.

Dr. Muir also influenced the lives of many people for other reasons. He was an avid outdoorsman and worked extensively for the continued preservation of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota as a wilderness area. He testified before committees of the United States House and Senate, advocating the continued preservation of this area. In the 1970s, he taught field botany and environmental biology at the Wilderness Field Station of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. Later, he became chairman of the executive committee that oversees activities of the station. He was active in his own community, where he assumed civic responsibilities dealing with community conservation and Dutch elm disease control.

He continued his many activities despite becoming totally blind in 1968 from complications of diabetes. He was a role model and served as an effective speaker for the handicapped. His numerous appearances on television and publicity in the popular press influenced public attitudes toward the blind. He was a speaker at the 1979 National Science Foundation Conference on the handicapped for the eastern United States.

Dr. Muir retired from active responsibility at Carleton College in 1984. He died unexpectedly, from complications of diabetes, on July 26, 1985. At the time of his death he was vacationing in a wilderness cabin called "Lycopodium Lodge" that he and his family built in northern Minnesota during the winter of 1976. He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, who played a major role in all of his activities, and four children, Patty, Cynthia, Peggy, and Bill, and four grandchildren.

We remember "Bill" as an extremely hard-working individual who never lost his sense of humor. He had a pioneering spirit and strongly believed that people should work things out for themselves. His infectious enthusiasm for life continues to influence many of us who were fortunate enough to know and love him.