

Lewis Ralph Jones, 1864–1945

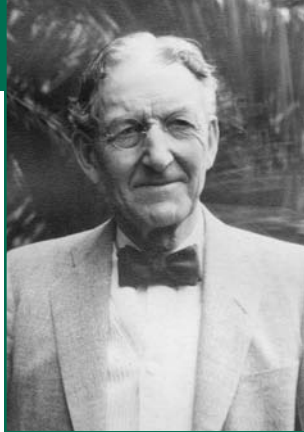
Lewis Ralph Jones was born in 1864 in Wisconsin. After completing his high school education, he entered Ripon College in 1884. Two years later, however, he left Ripon for the University of Michigan, where he studied botany with Volney M. Spalding. During his senior year at Michigan, Jones, then a premedical student, was invited to attend another student's Ph.D. defense. The student was Erwin Frink Smith, who was presenting his thesis on peach yellows. This marked a crucial event in Jones's career; he was so taken with Smith's research that, after further discussion with Spalding, he changed his plans from medicine to studying plant disease.

Jones completed his bachelor's degree in 1889 and promptly accepted a position at the University of Vermont Experiment Station as a botanist. This position carried with it a lectureship in natural history, and in 1893, Jones was promoted to professor of botany. He spent 21 years at

Vermont, where he built a strong record of research on early and late blight of potato and rot of cabbage. He traveled throughout Europe at the request of the USDA to study control of potato

blight through host resistance and, back in the United States, demonstrated to farmers the efficacy of

Bordeaux mixture as a means of controlling the disease in the field. He was also able to accept a one-semester research



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sabbatical at Smith's lab in Washington, DC. There, he demonstrated how *Bacillus carotovorus* (now *Erwinia carotovora*) causes soft rot in carrot by dissolving the middle lamella through the secretion of pectolytic enzymes. This research became the basis for Jones's own Ph.D. thesis, and he received his degree from Michigan in 1904.

In 1910, Jones left Vermont to become the first professor in and the chairman of the newly formed Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Wisconsin. There, he immediately set about establishing a strong program of both instruction and research. This reflected his vision for plant pathology as a discipline and profession. He believed that the science could not grow and mature without a commitment to both superior graduate instruction and research prowess. It was essential that students receive broad training in botany and keep up with current literature in plant pathology while also engaging in as much original research as possible. Under his leadership, the Department of Plant Pathology at Wisconsin quickly established itself as a leader in research on plant disease.

Jones held the chairmanship at Wisconsin until 1930, but his leadership activities extended beyond the university. He was a founding member and the first president of The American Phytopathological Society and became the first editor-in-chief of *Phytopathology*. He was elected president of the Botanical Society of America in 1913 and named to the National Academy of Sciences in 1920. Upon his death on March 31, 1945, Jones was among the most prominent plant pathologists in the United States.

Prepared by Christina Matta