

George John Stessel, 1919–1972

B. M. Zuckerman

George John Stessel, Associate Professor of Plant Pathology at the University of Rhode Island, died in March 1972.

Dr. Stessel was born March 17, 1919, in New Britain, Conn., and began undergraduate work at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. During World War II, he served in a medical section of the Army Air Force from 1940 to 1945, after which he entered Clark University, graduating cum laude with a B.A. degree in 1947. Thereafter he attended the University of Wisconsin, earning his M.S. degree in 1949 and the Ph.D. degree in 1952. His Ph.D. studies were carried out under the direction of C. Leben and G. W. Keitt, the title of his thesis being "A search for antibiotics for use in plant disease control". This work resulted in the discovery of several promising antifungal agents, among which were two, helixin and toximycin.

In 1951 Dr. Stessel joined an oak wilt research program at the Illinois Natural History Survey. This group was headed by L. Tehon and J. C. Carter, and many pathologists still active fondly remember the fine start their professional careers received under the guidance of these two able scientists.

Dr. Stessel left the Survey in 1952 and, after 4 years of evaluating candidate fungicides with the Hercules Powder Company, re-entered academic life as an Assistant Professor at the University of Rhode Island.

At the University of Rhode Island, Dr. Stessel

held an assignment as Extension Plant Pathologist, taught a graduate course in plant pathology, and guided a number of graduate students, both on the M.S. and Ph.D. levels. He was the author of numerous scientific articles, the most important of which were concerned with antibiotic agents against plant pathogens, oak wilt, and the biology of plant-parasitic nematodes.

He was twice chairman of the Northeastern Regional Research Project Group on plant-parasitic nematodes, and a committee member of the group from its inception in 1956 until his death.

His last sabbatical leave was spent working with the nematology group at the Rothamsted Experiment Station, England, where he studied applications of the stereoscan microscope to phytonematology. George loved Rothamsted and Rothamsted loved him. That very quiet manor house, home of visiting scientists and students from many lands, was much enlivened during his tenure there.

Dr. Stessel was a member of many professional organizations, among which were The American Phytopathological Society, Sigma Xi, Phi Sigma Honorary Biological Society, the Mycological Society of America, the European Society of Nematologists, the Society for Industrial Microbiology, and Gamma Alpha Graduate Scientific Society.

Dr. Stessel is survived by his wife Isabel, and his three children, Rosamonde, Robert, and Barbara.