

## John Gilmer Atkins, Jr., 1916-1973

Frances M. Latterell and W. J. Martin



John Gilmer Atkins, Jr., USDA Rice Pathologist at Beaumont, Texas, since 1954, died at his home in Beaumont on August 24, 1973.

John was born July 11, 1916 on a farm near Blairstown, Missouri. He attended the local public schools and graduated from Blairstown High School in 1935. Later that year he entered Central Missouri State

Teachers College, from which he received his BS in Biology in 1938. He received his early training in Plant Pathology under the auspices of a Crop Protection Institute Fellowship at Louisiana State University, where he earned his MS in Botany under A. G. Plakidas in 1940. He continued his graduate education in Plant Pathology at Cornell University until called to active duty with the Armed Forces in September 1943. He served capably as a Communications Officer (1st Lieut., Army Air Corps) in the Pacific Theater for three years. After his release from active duty in 1946, he resumed his graduate studies at Cornell under the late Donald S. Welch and received the Ph.D. in Plant Pathology from that institution in 1947.

Dr. Atkins spent the first five years of his professional career investigating diseases of forage and vegetable crops at the LSU Agricultural Experiment Station. In 1954 he accepted an appointment with the USDA Rice Investigations program in Beaumont, Texas. There for

the remaining twenty years of his life he devoted his talents and energies to the study of rice, its pathogens, and problems of breeding for disease resistance. He was author of more than 100 publications dealing with these subjects, and was completing a comprehensive survey of rice diseases in the Western Hemisphere at the time of his death. The international recognition and respect accorded Dr. Atkins by his colleagues is ample testimony to the quality of his contributions. He was invited to participate in international symposia on the rice blast disease in both hemispheres, and he headed the U.S. participants in the U.S. - Japan Cooperative Study of the Rice Blast Disease, 1965-67.

John's direct and forthright manner enhanced his ability to communicate with his colleagues. His plain-speaking, sometimes rustic Missouri style served him well in his many relationships with foreign scientists. Just as he possessed an unusual talent for presenting scientific papers in a concise and lucid manner, he had a talent for explaining and summarizing concepts so that even those whose native tongue was not English could understand. His genuine nature and sincere interest in helping other workers were always evident in his manner, both in spoken and written communication. He saw the problems clearly, and even in ill health, he contributed invaluable counsel and encouragement to his fellow workers throughout the world.

John is survived by his wife Sybil; three sons, James P. and Robert J. of Beaumont and Gene Irby of Houston; his father; and a sister, Mrs. Margaret Lihme.