Harold Thurston Cook, 1903-1975

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Harold Thurston Cook died August 13, 1975, at the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, of complications following a heart attack. He had retired January 1, 1971, as Director of the Market Quality Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

Harold was born at Greencastle, Indiana, November 15, 1903, the son of Dr. Melville Thurston Cook and Dora Reavill Cook. Harold's family background was exceptional in that his grandfather, William Cook, was a physician, and his father was an early teacher and researcher in plant pathology who served at the Cuba Experiment Station from 1904 to 1907 and held research professorships at the University of Delaware and Rutgers University. A scholarly home environment undoubtedly molded Harold's life and predestined his profession to be either medicine or plant science. Harold greatly admired his father and it is not surprising that he chose plant pathology.

After an early childhood in Cuba, Harold graduated from elementary school at Newark, Delaware, and from high school at New Brunswick, New Jersey. His character and ability were apparent in his scouting record. At the age of 16 he was an Eagle Scout and in 1920 was a delegate to the First International Boy Scout Jamboree.

Harold graduated from DePauw University in 1926 with an A.B. degree in Botany, then became a fellow at Cornell University where he studied the diseases of onions in the mucklands of upper New York State. In 1931, he returned to Cornell and received the Ph.D. degree in plant pathology. His thesis was entitled "Studies on the Downy Mildew of Onions, and the Causal Organism, *Peronospora destructor* (Berk) Caspary."

From 1930 until 1942 Dr. Cook headed the Plant Pathology Department at the Virginia Truck Experiment Station in Norfolk. From the beginning, he concentrated on projects of immediate concern to the farmers of that area. His publications while at Norfolk reflect his foremost objective: efficient control of the major plant pathogens with minimum amounts of fungicide. This long-held view appeared again in his address as retiring president of the Botanical Society of Washington in December, 1960, when he said, "Fungicides are useful and necessary for control of some plant diseases, but too often plant pathologists resort to them when other methods may be more effective, practical, and economical." This opposition to routine fungicide application caused controversy with certain fungicide industries. However, during the sudden and devastating epidemic of tomato late blight in 1946, Dr. Cook successfully applied his pioneering method of forecasting that disease on both tomatoes and potatoes, and proved the validity of his thesis. Based upon the occurrence of late blight in relation to temperature and rainfall in May, June, and July for a given area, his method enabled potato and tomato growers to save up to two million dollars by not spraying or dusting for late blight in 1947. Harold reestablished the complete confidence of growers and vindicated his position with industry as well.

In 1942, Dr. Cook entered active duty as a Navy lieutenant in the South and Central Pacific where he organized and administered inspection of fresh food supplies moving from New Zealand to the forward battle areas while serving on the staff of the U.S. Joint Purchasing Board in New Zealand. He also conducted research in the production, packing, storage, shipping, and utilization of those supplies. To observe the condition of fresh produce on board ship he served temporarily on the U.S.S. Roamer, U.S.S. Taurus, U.S.S. Octans, and the S.S. Arthuras A. Penn. For his contribution to the war effort, he received a letter of commendation from the Commander of the South Pacific Fleet. Dr. Cook remained active as a Naval Reserve Officer and was promoted to the rank of commander in 1953. Following the war, he returned to the Experiment Station at Norfolk and resumed his research on the diseases of vegetable crops.

In 1948, Dr. Cook was appointed Senior Plant Pathologist in the Section of Handling, Transportation, and Storage of Fruits and Vegetables, Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils and Agricultural Engineering, U.S. Department of Agriculture, at Beltsville, Maryland, with the understanding that he was moving from the field of research into administrative duties. For nearly 23 years, Harold T. Cook played an active role in the administration of research programs. When he assumed more responsibility in administration, he supervised not only all aspects in maintaining quality of fruits and vegetables during marketing, but also field crops and meat products. With ability and dedication he assumed an ever increasing share of responsibility. Dr. Cook was promoted to Principal Plant Pathologist in 1951, and from 1955 until 1971 he was classified as an Agricultural Administrator. He was Director of the Market Quality Research Division when he retired.

Harold was an active and enthusiastic participant in many scientific organizations throughout his career. He joined The American Phytopathological Society in 1927 and through the years served in various capacities. He was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Virginia Academy of Science, Mycological Society of America, Institute of Food Technologists, the Washington Academy of Science, and the Botanical Society of Washington, D.C., of which he was president in 1960-61.

His non-professional memberships included Delta Upsilon Fraternity, Sigma Xi, the Masonic Order, American Legion, Cosmos Club, and Rotary International. He received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from DePauw University in 1962.

As a part of his administrative duties, Dr. Cook participated in international and national programs. Under the Public Law 480, foreign aid program he made surveys and conducted negotiations in Poland, Yugoslavia, Finland, Israel, Italy, Spain, Germany, and The Netherlands. He participated in a symposium on "Biometeorology and Epidemiology of Fungal Diseases of Plants" at the Third International Biometeorological Congress, Pau, France, 1963.

In May, 1928, Harold T. Cook married Ruth Troutman of Batavia, New York. They had two daughters: Mrs. Margaret Cook Ramsey, Hanna City, Illinois; and Mrs. Sue Cook Oliver, Vashon, Washington. Ruth Troutman Cook died November 7, 1957. On May 10, 1963, Harold married Frances Jackson Wheatley. He is survived by his widow who lives at Edgewater, Maryland, his two daughters, and several grandchildren.

Dr. Cook made an outstanding contribution to plant pathology, but his duties went far beyond that discipline. His efforts were fruitful and his accomplishments were many during his 70 years, as evidenced by his 100 publications.