

William B. Allington, 1912-1976

John L. Wehing and Robert Staples



Dr. W. B. (Bill) Allington was born July 28, 1912, on the High Plains of western Nebraska in Cheyenne County. This territory was at this time being broken from virgin sod for winter wheat production. Unquestionably, Dr. Allington's ardor and candidness were shaped by the harsh pioneer environment in which drought, devastating

winds, and hail were frequent hazards to crop production.

His early education through high school took place at the village of Sunol. He then left home and went 400 miles east to attend the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture where he obtained a job in the Department of Plant Pathology. It was through this job that Bill became acquainted with Dr. R. W. Goss who guided his interests into the profession of Plant Pathology. Bill subsequently completed a masters degree under Dr. Goss in 1935 and then went to Wisconsin.

After completing his Ph.D. program under Dr. James Johnson at the University of Wisconsin in 1938, Dr. Allington remained as an Instructor in Horticulture and as an agent in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Division of Tobacco and Special Crops, a joint appointment. He worked on a number of tobacco diseases during this period, particularly tobacco wildfire (caused by *Pseudomonas tabaci*) and on the relationship between the meadow nematode and the brown root rot disease of tobacco. In 1943 he joined the USDA Regional Soybean Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana where he became regional coordinator for the soybean disease program in the North Central States. He initiated the first federally sponsored research on soybean diseases and helped in establishing cooperative research programs with several of the Experiment Stations in the northern soybean-producing states. During this period Bill found that *Pseudomonas tabaci* also caused a disease of soybeans (wildfire), determined that tobacco ringspot virus produced soybean budblight and, in conjunction with D. W. Chamberlain, isolated and proved that *Cephalosporium gregatum* was the cause of soybean brown stem rot, and developed a satisfactory quantitative method for measuring bacterial multiplication within plant leaves.

He remained with the USDA until 1948 when he returned to the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Nebraska as an associate professor. In 1949

he became a full professor and Chairman of the Department. At the time, the Department of Plant Pathology was structured in the classic mold in which plant diseases were studied on a commodity or crop basis. He believed that doing things in this way did not permit the in-depth research necessary for a full and basic comprehension of host-pathogen relationships. He restructured the research and teaching positions within the Department so that the faculty member became a specialist dealing only with a certain type of pathogen. He was convinced that the ultimate solution of plant disease problems lay in an understanding of the basic biochemical and biophysical phenomena involved in pathogen etiology. He thought that this was the approach that would eventually minimize the destructiveness of wheat stem rust, that breeding wheat for stem rust resistance was at best merely a palliative measure. Following this approach, he achieved a balance in the research program among investigations of fungi, bacteria, nematodes, and viruses. This latter area was greatly strengthened by inducing authorities in virology, serology, and physiology to join his staff. Through his efforts, sophisticated equipment for virological and physiological research was purchased. Although Dr. Allington extolled the basic approach, he and his staff still possessed a high degree of sensitivity for applied research.

Dr. Allington was instrumental in defining the epidemiology of the wheat streak mosaic virus disease in Nebraska so that as a result millions of dollars have been saved by Nebraska wheat growers. For this research Bill was recognized with an award from the Nebraska Wheat Commission and Crop Improvement Association. When the certified seed potato growers became alarmed about the high incidence of potato virus-X in their seed stock, Dr. Allington developed a virus-X free program through the use of meristem tissue culture.

Dr. Allington and his wife, Norma, had two sons. With Bill's strong support and encouragement and the use of the family garage, his eldest son, Robert, started an instrument design and manufacturing business that grew into the multimillion dollar Instrumentation Specialties Company (ISCO). John, the second son, later joined his brother in the business, and in 1968 Dr. Allington resigned from the University to join his two sons as a biological consultant, a position he held until his untimely death from cancer on September 16, 1976. He is survived by his two sons and second wife, Amy. He will always be remembered by his associates for his vision and leadership.