

Berch W. Henry, 1915-1977

F. F. Jewell



Berch W. Henry, retired Assistant Director of the Southern Forest Experiment Station, died May 19, 1977, in Gulfport, Mississippi, following a stubborn battle against cancer. Dr. Henry is survived by his wife Lorie, five children, and five grandchildren. Berch was born in Morgantown, West Virginia, where he received his elementary and secondary education. He attended West Virginia University, earning a BS degree in Botany in 1936 and a MS in plant pathology in 1938. Berch received the Ph.D. degree in plant pathology and physiology from the University of Wisconsin in 1941. While at Wisconsin, he initiated research on a then unknown disease of oaks (now commonly known as the oak wilt disease) and determined the causal agent to be a fungus, which was then named *Chalara quercina* Henry.

Berch served in the U. S. Navy from 1943 until his honorable discharge in 1946, at which time he was given an indefinite appointment as Plant Pathologist with the War Department at Fort Detrick at Frederick, Maryland. Here he conducted research on plant pathogens in conjunction with biological warfare until January, 1948.

Berch then transferred from the War Department to the Bureau of Plant Industry, USDA, as a Plant Pathologist and moved to Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He and his family lived there from 1948 to 1952 during his assignment to the W. W. Ashe Forest Tree Nursery, Brooklyn, Mississippi. While at the Ashe Nursery, Berch developed an economical and efficient means for control by soil fumigation techniques of a severe pine seedling root rot complex that threatened the existence of this large nursery. He was instrumental in the design and testing of the application equipment used in the fumigation procedures.

In 1953, when the Bureau of Plant Industry was absorbed by the USDA, Forest Service, Berch was reassigned to the Southern Forest Experiment Station and headquartered at the Harrison Experimental Forest, Saucier, Mississippi. Shortly after this, his duties,

and title were changed, and in 1954 Berch was made Officer-in-Charge of the Southern Institute of Forest Genetics and headquartered in Gulfport, Mississippi. He remained in this position until 1964 when he was transferred to the main offices of the Southern Forest Experiment Station in New Orleans, Louisiana. He retired in 1973 as an Assistant Director after more than 30 years of Federal Service.

During his tenure at Gulfport, although not actively engaged in personal research, Berch made his most valuable contribution. He was one of those far-sighted individuals to view the potential value of tree improvement research in the South. He was selected in 1955 for committee membership for an indefinite term by the Southern Forest Tree Improvement Committee. He remained in this capacity and was very active and supportive of the SFTIC goals, programs, and accomplishments until his transfer to New Orleans. Berch was a prime-mover in interesting the Mississippi Congressional Delegation to establish in southern Mississippi a modern research laboratory building for forest genetics, pathology, and entomology. This became a reality in 1960 and initially housed facilities of the Southern Institute of Forest Genetics, Forest Disease Laboratory, and the Forest Insect Laboratory. Today this unit houses the Forestry Sciences Laboratory at Gulfport with 19 scientific and 41 support people. Much of the progress of the tree improvement program in the South has resulted from application of results from research programs in genetics and disease resistance that originated under the able guidance of Dr. Henry during his period of service as Officer-in-Charge of the Southern Institute of Forest Genetics. He firmly believed in the improvement of the southern forests through the cooperative utilization of forest genetics, pathology, and entomology. He worked tirelessly toward this end.

Through the years of Federal service, Berch held many different positions of responsibility that covered a wide diversity of scientific and administrative persuasions. Each new challenge was handled in his inimitable gentle, easy-going but thorough manner. He was loyal to those he directed, lavish in his praise of success, compassionate, and understanding with failure. Equality was the cornerstone of his relationship with those with whom he associated and worked.