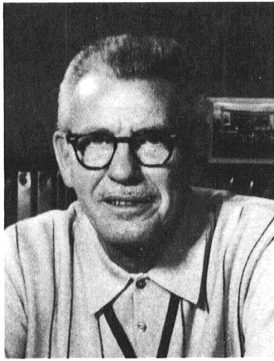


## Joseph Bjorn Skaptason, 1911-1987

Leon J. Tyler



Joseph Bjorn Skaptason, 75, South Kansas City, Missouri, died in Tampa, Florida, 10 February 1987. He and his wife Dorothy had been winter residents of the Tampa Bay area since 1979.

Skaptason was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 8 October 1911. He attended elementary schools in Winnipeg and high school in Glenboro, Manitoba. He studied at the Manitoba Agricultural College during 1929-1931 and the University of Alberta, 1931-1933, where he obtained a bachelor of science degree in agriculture. He was then granted a National Research Fellowship and continued studies at the University of Alberta. There he came under the tutelage of Professor A. W. Henry, an outstanding plant scientist and plant pathologist. Two years later (1935) Joseph was granted a master of science degree by the university. While at the University of Alberta, he married Gwendolyn Pecknold (she passed away 14 February 1974).

Encouraged to continue graduate study, he applied to and was admitted into the Cornell University Graduate School in September 1936, where he chose plant pathology as his major field with minors in plant physiology and entomology.

During the period of his association with the plant pathology department, he devoted summer months to performing copper dust and spray experiments on potatoes at the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Riverhead, Long Island, New York, under the supervision of Professor F. M. Blodgett. During the fall and spring semesters of the university, he attended formal courses and performed studies of the bacterium that causes the ring rot disease of potatoes, his thesis problem, which was investigated under the supervision of Professor Walter H. Burkholder. He completed requirements for the Ph.D. in plant pathology in February 1942. His doctoral dissertation was entitled, "Studies on the Bacterial Ring Rot Disease of Potatoes."

During his tenure as a graduate student, he wrote several papers concerning results of spraying potatoes on Long Island for control of foliage diseases and insect pests. He also investigated the relation of the copper content of Long Island soils, long cropped with potatoes, to tuber rot caused by *Phytophthora infestans*. The papers were published in the American Potato Journal.

From his long learning and practical work experience and his hard-won doctoral degree, Dr. Skaptason realized that improvements in pest control agents could greatly benefit agriculture. This led to an illustrious career in the agricultural chemical industry.

He began his career with Naugatuck Chemical Co., involved in the development of Phygon (dichlone) as a seed treatment chemical and Spergon (chloranil) as a seed and foliar fungicide. Skaptason then joined John Powell & Co. as assistant sales manager. In 1949 he was an active participant in the formation of

Pittsburg Agricultural Chemical Division of Pittsburg Coke and Chemical Co. and served as its vice president until the division was merged into Chemagro Corporation—now MOBAY.

In 1956, Dr. Skaptason returned to the work he loved, the development of new pesticides, as manager of agricultural product development for Spencer Chemical Co., in Kansas City. Then in 1959, he organized Bio-search & Dev. Co., Inc. to make his broad experience available to all chemical companies with an interest in pesticides. BS & D offered a variety of services to chemical companies. A complete screening service in lab and greenhouse was followed by field evaluation in major agricultural areas. With his background in biochemistry and screening, he also counseled synthesis chemists in several companies.

In 1962, he teamed with Dr. Herbert Schwartz, who was conducting chemical research at the University Organic Chemistry Laboratory and the Institute for Organic Chemistry T. N. O. at the University of Utrecht in The Netherlands. Between them, they synthesized and screened more than 1,000 chemicals, which resulted in scores of patents. As the work progressed, they began special emphasis on analides as cotton herbicides as described in their monograph "Chemical Weed Control in Cotton."

"Skap," as he was known to scores of people, including family, close friends, business associates, and others, was an avid flyer and owned his own planes. They were used in the business to view experimental plots on farms scattered widely in agricultural areas. He was loathe to give up flying for reasons of health.

Joseph Skaptason was well thought of by his peers; he was a member of the honorary scientific society of Sigma Xi. He is listed in "Who's Who in American Men of Science."

He kept abreast of developments in a changing world. He was a member of the American Phytopathological Society, the Weed Science Society of America, and the Ecological Society of America.

Dr. Skaptason pursued many interests. He designed and built radio-controlled aircraft, one of which had a 14-foot wingspan and actually performed as a spray plane; he spent many hours playing the organ, reading, or painting in acrylics. Both he and his wife, Dorothy, loved photography, and did their own developing and enlarging. They have hundreds of enlargements from their travels all over the United States.

In addition to his work, he gave generously of his time, means, and knowledge. At the end of World War II, he contributed six months as chief of the Pesticide and Fertilizer Section of the Office of Price Stabilization in Washington, DC.

Dr. Skaptason was a member of the Cornell Club of Kansas City. He was one of the founders and past president of the Icelandic Association of Kansas City. He was an active member and senior warden of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Kansas City.

He was instrumental in starting many young men into careers in the scientific world and has many proteges scattered around the country.

He is survived by his wife Dorothy McArtor Skaptason, a son Joseph, a stepson Michael, two brothers, and five grandchildren.