

Alexander Murdoch French, 1920–1987

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Alexander Murdoch French died of a heart attack on December 10, 1987. At the time he was nearing completion of Volume Two, "Field Crops," of a monumental five-volume project, "California Plant Disease Host Index." Volume One, "Fruits and Nuts," was published in October of 1987. The Department of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento, California, plans to complete the entire project in honor of Dr. French.

Alexander was born in New Bedford, Pennsylvania, on 20 April 1920. He attended public schools in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, and received his secondary education in New Alexandria, Pennsylvania, and Topeka, Kansas. In 1942, he graduated with the B. S. degree from Muskingum College in Ohio; and in 1950 Alexander received the Ph.D. degree from Cornell University. During an interim period—the World War II years—before completing his doctorate, he worked as a civilian scientist in the Manhattan Project at Columbia University.

Dr. French's professional career began in 1950 with employment as a plant pathologist by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. He began in Riverside, where he was involved in plant disease survey and identification, etc. He was also responsible for training county agricultural inspectors to recognize various plant diseases, a job at which he excelled. He was promoted, as a result, to associate plant pathologist in November of 1950. In April of 1959, Dr. French was transferred to Sacramento, promoted to senior plant nematologist, and given supervisory responsibility for the nematology diagnostic laboratory. In this role, he was responsible for implementing new techniques for nematode quarantines, the development of nursery regulatory programs for nematodes, such as pear decline and barley root knot. He maintained an ongoing interest in these statewide detection

programs.

In November of 1962, Dr. French was promoted to program supervisor for the Plant Nematology Laboratory in Sacramento. In July of 1965 he was also given responsibility for the Plant Pathology Laboratory.

Beginning in 1963, Alexander initiated and served as editor of a department bulletin called Nema-News. Among his other innovations, in cooperation with Dr. S. A. Sher, he initiated the California Plant Nematology Workshop. The first workshop was held in Fresno in March of 1968. The workshops have been continued on an annual basis ever since, and are still jointly sponsored by the Department and the University of California.

In 1973, Dr. French was appointed principal staff pathologist/nematologist for the Division of Plant Industry of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. In this important staff position, he was responsible for advising the department administration on all regulatory and biological aspects of plant pest problems relating to plant pathology and nematology. During the same year, "Distribution of Plant Parasitic Nematodes in California" was published, of which Alexander was co-author, along with Dr. I. A. Siddiqui and Dr. S. A. Sher. Alexander continued in this position until his retirement on 1 December, 1984.

Dr. French was a warm and friendly man. Many of the young people to whom he gave piano lessons over a 30-year period will attest to that, as will the host of friends and colleagues with whom he associated. He was a member of the Sacramento Symphony Association, the Sacramento Ballet Association, Crocker Art Museum Association, and the Comstock Club, as well as the scientific associations, American Phytopathological Society, and American Society of Nematologists.

Alexander French is survived by his wife Naomi; a son, Thomas, of Davis, CA; a daughter, Patricia Grimm of Fair Oaks, CA; a brother, the Rev. William French of Oregon; a sister, Martha Smock, of New York; and four grandchildren.