

Mitrofan Michaelovich Afanasiev, 1900–1988

E. L. Sharp

Dr. Mitrofan M. Afanasiev passed away in Sun City, Arizona, on June 19, 1988, following a massive heart attack and heart surgery. He was born in Kotovskaia, Don, Russia, November 21, 1900. He attended the Royal Yugoslavia University from 1920 to 1923 and received a B.S. degree from the Higher School of Agriculture, Brna, Czechoslovakia, in 1927. From 1928 to 1930, he was manager of the Maly Kiar Agricultural Estate, Slovakia, Czechoslovakia.



Mitro, as he was known to a host of friends, came to the U.S. in 1930, initiated graduate work at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln under Dr. R. W. Goss and was awarded the doctorate in plant pathology in 1937. He became a naturalized citizen in 1935 and was married in the same year. In 1936, he joined the staff of the Agricultural Experiment Station in the Department of Botany and Bacteriology at Montana State University, Bozeman, and advanced through the ranks becoming professor of plant pathology in 1948. He served as leader of the Plant Pathology Section until his retirement in 1967.

Mitro was a plant pathologist in the broadest sense and his activities included research, teaching, and extension. Early in his professional career he worked with seedling diseases of sugar beets. His investigations culminated in identification of the influence of crop residues and rotations on the diseases, the development of optimum fertilizer requirements, and adequate assays for detecting disease resistance to root rot caused by *Aphanomyces* spp., *Rhizoctonia* spp., and *Fusarium* spp. This research resulted in several inbred lines of sugar beets with superior disease resistance and quality for the intermountain area of the United States. He also led intensive investigations on simulated hail injury to sugar beets and cereals, which were among the most comprehensive studies ever made on this nonparasitic malady. These efforts led to much more equitable hail insurance adjustments to growers. Shortly after the true nature of barley

stripe mosaic virus was discovered, he also established a BSMV assay program that led to decreases in the disease and concomitant financial gains to barley growers.

His other research interests included work with stone fruit viruses, strawberry root rots, bacterial blights of beans, potato scab, iron chlorosis and winter and frost injury to various crops and ornamentals. His efforts resulted in a stone fruit nursery in western Montana where he actively investigated Lambert Mottle disease and first reported on the "Short Stem Virus" of sweet cherries. He published more than 80 papers in various scientific journals on his research endeavors.

Mitro taught both beginning and advanced courses in plant pathology and his extensive experience with many plant diseases and enthusiastic presentations held the interest and respect of many students. He always had time to discuss problems with students and staff, never accepted an eight-hour day—starting his work early in the morning and finishing late in the evening. Even after retiring at Sun City, he still functioned as the resident plant doctor.

As a part-time extension plant pathologist, he was consistently rated near the top on the basis of his presentations at training schools conducted for agents and growers. The wide diversity of plant disease problems and the large area of the state made the role of extension difficult, but he cheerfully carried the burden.

Professionally, Mitro was a member of the American Phytopathological Society, AIBS, the Montana Horticultural Society, and the Montana Crop Improvement Association. He also held membership in Phi Sigma, Sigma Xi (MSU Chapter president 1947–1948) and was an editor of the Journal of the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists.

Mitro is survived by his wife Frances and one daughter, Jane Hager, both of Sun City, Arizona. In their free time, Mitro and Frances especially enjoyed fishing in the blue ribbon trout streams forming the head waters of the Missouri River. This included both summer and winter outings.

In addition to being a competent, broad-based plant pathologist, Mitro will always be remembered as a compassionate, friendly person.