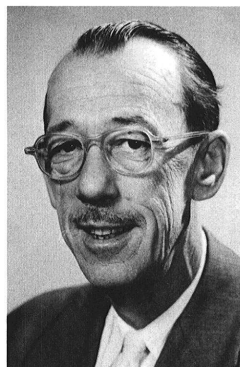


## Eric G. Sharvelle, 1908–1989

Donald H. Scott and C. Wendell Horne



Dr. Eric George Sharvelle, Professor Emeritus of Plant Pathology at Purdue University, died on January 23, 1989, in Lafayette, Indiana. Eric was an unusual man with an unusual background and unusual talent. Independent, articulate, witty, and charming, he brought honor to his profession and helped countless students, colleagues, growers, and citizens during his long and productive career.

Eric was born on August 28, 1908, in Longfield, Kent, England, and spent his early childhood in Bombay, India, where his father was Chief-of-Staff for the British Armed Forces in the Far East. He received his early education from a private governess in India. At the age of nine, he returned to England where he completed his primary education.

Eric was only seventeen when he emigrated alone to Montreal, Canada, where he entered MacDonald College, McGill University under a colonization plan of the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company. At this early age, he already displayed his lifelong self-reliant nature which helped make him the leader he was to become. He was among the first of the English public school students who emigrated to Canada under the colonization plan, and he periodically returned to England for short visits with his family by working his passage on cattle boats. He received a 2-year diploma in agriculture from McGill, followed by his B.S.A. degree in 1930.

In the fall of 1930, he was awarded a Canadian National Research Council Fellowship and entered the University of Alberta where he earned his M.S. degree in 1932. He then proceeded to the University of Minnesota where he earned his Ph.D. in plant pathology under the direction of the legendary E. C. Stakman in 1934. Upon graduation, he returned to England where he did postdoctoral studies with Sir E. J. Butler at The Imperial Mycological Institute, Kew Gardens. In 1935, he returned to Canada and operated the family-owned 200-acre commercial apple orchard in Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia. He began post-doctoral research on the effects of fruit diseases on host physiology in 1938 at Cornell University under Dr. H. H. Whetzel. In 1939, he transferred to the New York Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva to work on fruit fungicides with Dr. J. M. Hamilton. There he received a Crop Protection Institute Fellowship to conduct organic fungicide research under the direction of Dr. J. G. Horsfall. He accompanied Dr. Horsfall to the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven to continue his research on organic fungicides. From this research, the first commercial organic fungicide, Spergonex, was developed and released, as well as Spergonex and Fungisul. His basic research later resulted in the introduction of Phygon.

Eric was appointed assistant professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Minnesota in the fall of 1939 where he conducted research and extension programs in fruit pathology and fungicides and taught graduate courses. He accepted the position of associate professor and extension plant pathologist in the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology at Purdue University in 1946 and was promoted to full professor in 1952. Eric was the first specialist in the Cooperative Extension Service at Purdue to hold a Ph.D. degree. He remained at Purdue until his retirement in September 1976 and was named emeritus professor.

At Purdue, Eric distinguished himself as a knowledgeable scientist, an excellent plant pathologist, an articulate speaker, a prolific author, a talented cartoonist, and an outstanding extension educator. He developed extension programs in plant disease control that formed the basis for current programs. He established the Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic in the department in 1960 to provide assistance and training to county agents in the diagnosis and control of plant diseases. He started the popular "What's Cooking in Plant Diseases" newsletter which provided timely disease and disease control information to county agents, farmers, and colleagues in surrounding states. He was an articulate, humorous speaker, and with his British-tinged speech could hold the attention of an audience, whether researchers, students, or farmers. He made plant pathology a fascinating, understandable subject and humorously referred to himself as "The Smut and Rot Doctor."

Eric was a prolific author who published hundreds of extension publications and popular articles for trade journals, magazines, and mass media as well as over 70 scientific papers and experiment station bulletins. He authored three books, *Nature and Uses of Modern Fungicides* (1960), *Chemical Control of Plant Diseases* (1968), and *Plant Disease Control* (1979). He was a pioneer in the concept of team teaching and demonstration with extension specialists in allied pest disciplines more than a decade before integrated pest management became recognized. He distinguished himself with his leadership, dedication, foresight, and professionalism during the southern corn leaf blight epidemic during 1970–1971. Eric immediately recognized the potential dangers of the disease to corn production and was a major force in organizing a response team of research and extension personnel.

Eric was a faithful and staunch supporter of Purdue University and the concepts of the land grant system and the Cooperative Extension Service. He developed a rapport with farmers, county agents, and fellow extension specialists that rarely has been exceeded. To honor Eric's strong convictions, dedication, and love for Purdue and Indiana agriculture, his family established "The Sharvelle Distinguished Extension Specialist Award." This award has been given yearly since 1985 to a Purdue extension specialist who has demonstrated an outstanding degree of proficiency and professionalism in the conduct of extension programs over an extended period of time.

Eric possessed an inquisitive mind and an insatiable desire to learn throughout his life. In 1968, he took sabbatic leave at Texas A & M University, and from 1973 to 1977, he worked in Brazil as a member of the Purdue Research Team. In retirement, he maintained a strong interest in phytopathology and world affairs while residing at the family home in Lafayette, Indiana, and a family condominium on South Padre Island, Texas.

Dr. Sharvelle was awarded the USDA Length of Service Award for 20 years of service (1967), the Epsilon Sigma Phi 25 Year Award (1971), the Speaker's Club Award, Miami Beach, Florida (1969), and was the first honorary member of the Texas Association of Plant Pathology and Nematology, Texas A & M University (1969). He was a member of Sigma Xi, Gamma Sigma Delta, Epsilon Sigma Phi, American Association for the Advancement of Science, The Golf Course Superintendent's Association of America, and The American Phytopathological Society.

Eric married Gladys McKibbin in Nova Scotia on October 23, 1935. He is survived by Gladys, two daughters, Mrs. Cynthia Nicholson of Normal, Illinois, and Mrs. Linda Craig of Acton, Indiana; a son, Derek Sharvelle, M.D., of Battleground, Indiana; eight grandchildren; and three sisters who live in England. All who knew or associated with Eric miss him.