

## Roy Maurice Myers, 1911-2000

Robert D. Henry  
24 Grandview Dr., Macomb IL 61455

Dr. R. Maurice ("Maurie") Myers, long-time botanist in the Department of Biological Sciences at Western Illinois University, died at age 88 on May 18, 2000 in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. He was born in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania on September 24, 1911 and was raised and graduated from high school in Youngstown, Ohio. He received three degrees from The Ohio State University: B. Sc. (biology education) in 1934, M.A. (botany) in 1937, and Ph.D. (plant physiology) in 1939. During 1934-35 he taught high school in Ohio. He was a graduate assistant in botany at The Ohio State University from 1935-38, and at Northwestern University from 1938-40 including post-doctoral studies there. From 1940-42 he was an instructor at Boise (Idaho) Junior College and from



1942-45 he served as an assistant professor of biology at Denison (Ohio) University. Dr. Myers came to Western Illinois University (WIU) in 1945 as an assistant professor and retired as professor in 1977. During his tenure at WIU, he served as department chairman from 1953-69, and herbarium curator from 1946-77. While at WIU, the Department of Biological Sciences grew and became more professionalized. He was instrumental in the planning and acquisition of the greenhouse and the Alice L. Kibbe Life Science Station. He married Vivian Ward in 1938. She and their four children survive. His professional society memberships included The International Association for Plant Taxonomy, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Biological Sciences, Society of Economic Botanists, Sigma Xi, Illinois State Academy of Science (botany section Chair), Ohio Academy of Science (fellow), and Association of Midwestern Biology Teachers (President).

Although trained as a plant physiologist (growth substances), Dr. Myers' professional life centered around other interests. These can be summarized best by his characteristic answer to a plant question - often an identification one - given in terms of its common and scientific name, if an alien, where originated, geographical location and habitat, and its economic importance including if a weed. He was a dedicated and thoroughly prepared teacher, an inspiration to undergraduate and graduate students and a mentor to me. Dr. Myers' teaching was primarily plant systematics, plant geography, and economic botany courses. His personality was affable and was always ready to help. He traveled

worldwide with an interest in international affairs, especially population and economic botany which helped define and expand his teaching and research.

An overview of Dr. Myers' varied professional contributions and interests are summarized by discipline. Plant Physiology: effect of growth substances on the absciss layer in *Coleus blumei* leaves; Plant Ecology and Geography: vegetation of Idaho, initial report of McDonough County, Illinois vegetation; Biology Education and Teaching: what is respiration, improving the teaching of biology in the secondary schools of west-central Illinois, the field tour method of teaching biology. He was very active in leading National Education Association field study tours worldwide; Economic Botany: forage plants, mahogany utilization in the United States, population and food. He gave the WIU Annual Faculty Lecture in 1977 "World Population and Food Research" which honored him as an outstanding faculty member for scholarly achievements and contributions. In retirement in Florida in 1985, he expressed his "increasing interest in demography and the serious world problems caused by the population explosion" giving local examples as plant extinction and wooded areas disappearing, overwhelming infrastructure problems, increased taxes and addition of zip codes; Floristics and Systematics: annotated catalog and index for the Illinois flora, McDonough County flora additions, changes in the native and alien flora of McDonough and Hancock counties, Illinois, edible plants that grow wild in Illinois, checklists of McDonough County vascular plants, and studies at Kew Gardens, West Indies and southern Florida.

Dr. Myers founded the WIU Herbarium in 1946, which at his retirement was named The R.M. Myers Herbarium in his honor. He was an early leader in bringing alien awareness to floristic studies, and in his 1972 catalog and index to the Illinois flora, referred to them as causing "plant pollution" and also included a perceptive discussion of the role of aliens in the flora and the consideration of the "time factor" in evaluating alien status. His use of the term "disturbophytes" was insightful. The cover illustration well exemplifies his perspective: "The lower part symbolizes the flora of North America and Illinois at the time of the early explorations and colonization by Europeans when the introduction of weeds, ornamentals and economic plants from the Old World began. The upper right-hand corner represents the introduction of plants in Illinois from the Old World, other parts of the USA and the Americas by farmers, trucks, and railroads in areas where the native vegetation has been disturbed or destroyed."

After his retirement Dr. Myers lived in Florida and then Kentucky. In Florida he kept a herbarium and a library emphasizing the vascular plants of Charlotte County. He was active in groups concerning food, population and international issues. His yard contained a collection of tropical and economic plants. He gave seminars on native landscaping. His stationary letterhead said "Economic Botanist". He was a member of the Sarasota United Nations Association (President), the Selby Botanical Gardens, and attended the Florida Academy of Science meetings. He continued to travel worldwide. His hobbies included photography, genealogy, gardening, electronics, and "home repairs".

Dr. Myers is buried in the New Elizabethtown Memorial Gardens, Cecelia, Kentucky. His expertise, counsel, and friendship will be missed.