

Otis Freeman Curtis, Jr.

January 28, 1915 — July 18, 1988

Otis Freeman Curtis, Jr., emeritus professor of plant physiology, Department of Horticultural Sciences, had 73 years of association with Cornell at the time of his death. He was born in Ithaca, the son of Otis F. Curtis, Sr., professor of botany at Cornell, and spent his boyhood here. He received his B.A. degree from Oberlin College in 1936, but came back to Cornell for his Ph.D. degree, which he received in 1940. Otis took a job as junior plant physiologist and instructor at the University of California at Los Angeles from 1940-42. From 1942 to 1946 he was associate physiologist with the United States Department of Agriculture Guayule Project at Salinas, California. He then joined the Department of Pomology of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva, where he stayed until he retired in 1980.

Ote, as he was known, worked primarily in herbicides for fruit crops. He tested many new herbicides that were being developed at that time and also worked in techniques of applying herbicides. He was a regular speaker at the New York State Horticultural Society meetings and the County Fruit Schools on herbicides, and was well-known and appreciated by county agents and fruit growers. He served for many years on the Northeast Weed Control Committee and in the Northeast Weed Science Society. He was awarded a Certificate of Merit of that organization for a paper on "Weed Control in Peach Nurseries with Terbacil."

Otis had several cooperative projects with a number of entomologists and plant pathologists on the effect of various pesticides on the growth and yield of apple trees. In particular, he worked with Dr. Siegfried Lienk on the effect of various levels of mite infestations on the yield of apples. He also worked on techniques of crop forecasting in apples.

Otis was a member of numerous professional societies: American Society for Horticultural Science, International Society for Horticultural Science, Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, Weed Science Society of America, and Sigma Xi. He was interested in university governance, and was a member of the University Senate 1972-74, and the Faculty Council of Representatives 1974-77.

His other greatest interest was barbershop singing. He was very active in the Geneva Chapter SPEBSQSA for 38 years. He was area counselor, president of the local organization, and held several other offices in the group. He sang bass in several quartets. Otis was elected to the National Hall of Fame of the club in 1978.

Another great interest of Otis and Elizabeth, his wife, was the American Indian Program of the Save the Children Foundation. They visited reservations in the south and the southwest and worked in support of the Indian Tribes.

Otis is survived by his wife Elizabeth; his two children, Cynthia (Mrs. Timothy Volin) and Otis F. Curtis, III; his sister, Mrs. Frank Walkley; and four grandchildren.

Otis was a warm and friendly colleague who served the Department of Pomology well. He was always willing to discuss a problem, whether it had to do with herbicides or statistics. He loved the out-of-doors and knew many wild plants. He was a great help in identifying wildflowers.

Robert C. Lamb, Roger D. Way, Donald W. Barton