

Dr. Robert Phillip Upchurch

Period of Office: 1972-1973

Service to WSSA

For a nine year period up to 1965, I served on the editorial board under elder weed scientist C.J. Willard, Editor of the journal *Weeds*. He honored me by indicating that he wanted me to succeed him, but thought this assignment inappropriate for an industry employee.

I served on a variety of WSSA committees, but when I served as vice-president under President Glenn Klingman, he gave me a choice of assignments. I selected the option to chair a committee on outreach. This allowed me to evaluate the options and to come up with the idea of creating a popular publication. I worked hard on this project and continued to champion it after I became president. The fruition of this project was the magazine *Weeds Today*. The objective was to extend the reach of WSSA to practitioners and the general public, including high school students who might be recruited to our field of work. This was a very ambitious project and it met with a degree of success over a number of years. Many WSSA members worked hard on this project including Gale Buchanan and Ellery Knake as Editors. The story needs to be more fully told.

In approaching my tour of duty as president of WSSA, I had the view that the organization had a great deal of untapped potential. It was my full intent to spearhead a solid awakening. As a start, I expanded the committee structure of the organization and proceeded to enroll a large percentage of the membership in one committee or another. Here is a sketchy list of the WSSA activities I originated or reinvigorated:

- Greatly expanded the committee structure
- *Weeds Today* magazine
- Initiated the WSSA Newsletter
- Initiated the WSSA Photo Contest
- Originated or activated the WSSA Endowment Program. I made a pitch to Monsanto for a \$10,000 contribution and actually got \$5,000, which I believe was the first donation of money for the project.

Other examples will surface over time. A special issue arose while I was president. The Aquatic Weed group showed signs of departing WSSA and forming its own national society. I encouraged the WSSA Board to seriously address this issue and to evaluate whether WSSA should form an "umbrella" society similar to the Agronomy Society to embrace several professional thrusts including, for example, plant growth regulation. I appointed an Umbrella Study Committee, chaired by Jerry Weber. After considerable debate, the decision was made not to convert WSSA to an umbrella society. However, by this time, the plant growth regulator movement showed strong signs of needing an organization and an organizational home. I had become enamored with this movement. As I prepared to exit the presidency of WSSA, I elected to take on a leadership role for the plant growth regulator movement. This entire story including

the WSSA umbrella study had been documented by me as a chapter in my memoirs, "From City Shadows," and may be accessed online from the Upchurch Collection in Special Collections at N.C. State University.

V. Post WSSA Activities

As past president of WSSA, I gladly took a back seat, but was pleased when I was made a Fellow of the Society in 1975. Subsequent to this, I was also pleased to be made an honorary member of the Western Society of Weed Science, due in large part to my nominator Harvey Tripple. As manager of the Plant Growth Regulator Working Group (PGRWG), I engineered a joint meeting with WSSA in 1974 in Las Vegas, NV. It was a very successful joint meeting. I continued to serve the PGRWG as manager for five years, exerting an exceptional amount of energy to build momentum. The organization now operates in its fifth decade.

Following my efforts with the PGRWG, I took on major responsibilities for CAST, serving as president of the organization in 1982. There I played a major role in launching the popular publication *Science of Food and Agriculture*. My CAST service is also documented online as a part of my memoirs lodged at N.C. State University.

My 20 years of service at the University of Arizona College of Agriculture involved the headship of the Plant Sciences Department, Associate Director of the Experiment Station, Associate Dean for Instruction, Director of Development, Director of Alumni Affairs, Director of Arboretum Affairs, and Director and originator of the Desert Legume Program. Additionally, I served for eight years in the 1980s as an advisor to the president of the Eli Lilly company as a result of my close relationship with the late Ed Alder. Monsanto also asked me to serve as a consultant as did several other companies, where my expertise was useful in legal matters relative to agricultural research and development, all growing out of my experience as a weed scientist.

From 1984 on, I took on as a side project purchasing farms in Montgomery County, MO, eventually amassing some 1700 acres. Upon retirement in 1995, I proceeded to implement a grand program of developing enterprises associated with the land venture. The tracts were 90% tillable, but needed improvement. My wife and I won the 1994 Missouri State-wide Soil Conservation award for this work. While I had been minimally involved in weed science for the prior 20 years, my retirement brought me up close and personal to weeds as I manually cleared spots of shattercane from our corn and soybean fields.

By 2000, I had concluded that at age 72 it was not wise for me to continue my ambitious farm related venture on a personal basis. I sold my equipment and returned the farming to skilled operators working on shares. We have since transferred some of the land to our heirs and converted some to city rentals.

With farming put on the back burner, I turned with a vengeance to my love of family history. Details may be seen on my websites, www.upchurchstory.com and www.alliedfamilies.com.

Retirement found us moving from Tucson, AZ to Lake St. Louis, MO in 1994, to Chesterfield, MO in 2000, and lastly to Friendship Village in Chesterfield in 2014.

VI. Other Personal and Concluding Remarks

The greatest blessing of my life was to be married to Sallaine Sledge in Raleigh, NC on August 21, 1948. We have three married children and eight grandchildren, two married, and one great-grandchild - Claire Sallaine King. Sallaine and I had similar backgrounds and with common purpose have blended our strong personalities to great advantage.

It was a rare privilege for me to enter the young field of weed science as a young professional. We grew up together and this field of endeavor presented me with great opportunities for work and service. I enjoyed my labors and my rewards and treasure memories of many fine professionals. To the field I owe much.

P.S. As of 2014, my memoirs are about 25% complete. Hopefully, the WSSA chapter will be completed in 2015 and will be online as a part of the Upchurch Collection at N.C. State University, along with a repository of supporting documents.

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