

2009

Dr. Lois Hattery Tiffany (1924-2009): In Memoriam

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Recommended Citation

Lewis, Deborah Q. (2009) "Dr. Lois Hattery Tiffany (1924-2009): In Memoriam," *Journal of the Iowa Academy of Science: JIAS*, 116(1-4), 44-48.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/jias/vol116/iss1/8>

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Dr. Lois Hattery Tiffany (1924–2009): In Memoriam

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Dr. Lois Hattery Tiffany, Distinguished Professor Emerita, Department of Ecology, Evolution and Organismal Biology, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, died on 6 September 2009. Dr. Tiffany was an outstanding mycologist and teacher. Held in high regard by the public as “Iowa’s Mushroom Lady” and known by many students, colleagues and friends as “Dr. T.,” she was the matriarch of the Botany Department (now the Department of Ecology, Evolution and Organismal Biology) at Iowa State.

She was born on a farm near Collins, Iowa, on 8 March 1924 to Charles and Blanche (Brown) Hattery. Her parents encouraged her love of the outdoors, her success as a student and her participation in activities such as the 4-H Club. She married F. H. (Hank) Tiffany on 16 May 1945 in Denver, Colorado. To them were born three children, Ray, Jean and David. She is survived by her three children, five grandchildren and one great-grandchild. She was preceded in death by her parents, husband and one grandson.

Dr. Tiffany’s degrees were all from Iowa State University: Bachelor of Science in 1945, Master of Science in 1947, and Ph.D. in 1950. Her interests in mycology began during her first undergraduate botany course. When Dr. Joseph Gilman, the department’s mycologist, introduced the topic of fungal diversity, she was “hooked.” Unlike a number of other faculty members of the time, Dr. Gilman was willing to encourage her development as a woman scientist, and he served as her mentor during her years as a student and young member of the faculty. She recalled how the earliest classes and labs she taught as a graduate student teaching assistant were filled with World War II veterans coming to Iowa State on the “G.I. Bill.” These young men just returning to civilian life hardly knew what to make of her as a young female teacher, a new experience for them! She also spoke of their great eagerness to learn and how she had to work hard to stay a step ahead of them in the curriculum.

She joined the faculty of the Botany Department in 1950, served as department chair from 1990 to 1996, and achieved the title of Distinguished Professor in 1994. Her tenure at Iowa State officially ended with her retirement in 2002; yet even in retirement, Dr. Tiffany continued to teach or co-teach mycology courses, carry out several research projects, and serve the public by leading field trips, making presentations and identifying or answering questions about fungi. Her years on the Iowa State faculty may be unrivaled in length. If asked to describe her early experiences at Iowa State, she seldom complained directly of unfair treatment as the only woman on the department’s faculty early in her career. If pushed on the point, she would typically tell stories about the obstacles faced by other women on the faculty in other departments or that preceded her, obviously using these to illustrate her own, similar struggles.

Dr. Tiffany taught mycology, general botany and field botany courses, both at ISU and at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory near Milford. She advised many hundreds of undergraduate students and served as a committee member for numerous graduate students. She was the major professor or co-major professor for 24 Master’s and 17 Ph.D. students (Table 1). Many of the graduate students she mentored have added greatly to the field of mycology in their teaching and research. Her mentoring sometimes required a blunt honesty, but the students also knew that even this arose from her caring about each of them.

For 35 years, she and Dr. George Knaphus were co-advisors of ISU’s Botany Club. Together, they led student field trips to such places as Big Bend National Park in Texas, Grand Canyon National Park, Smoky Mountains National Park, Arkansas’s Ozark Mountains, and the national parks and other areas in Utah (frequently joined by Dr. Stanley Welsh, ISU alumnus and professor at Brigham Young University).

She also shared her passion for fungi in numerous field trips, presentations, short-courses and workshops for the general public across Iowa, doing so annually at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory and the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar near Onawa. Her door was always open to any who stopped by with fungi for identification or other questions. The staff of the Iowa Poison Control Center requested her help numerous times for the identification and information about toxic effects of a fungus that had been ingested.

Her research, although mainly focused on Iowa’s mycology, was broad in scope. Her research projects included studies of fungal diseases of native prairie plants in Iowa, a 10-year survey of Iowa’s morels and false-morels, the occurrence of aflatoxin (from the fungus *Aspergillus flavus*) in stored corn, a study of the fungus flora of Big Bend National Park, and many others. A look at the lengthy list of publications indicates that she was proficient at working on her own projects as well as collaborating with colleagues and graduate students. Dr. Knaphus joined her on many projects, as did her earliest collaborator and mentor Dr. Gilman, Dr. Donald Huffman (mycologist at Central College), Dr. Harry Horner and many others from the Botany/EEOB and Plant Pathology departments at ISU.

Dr. Tiffany was the Mycological Curator of the Ada Hayden Herbarium. She not only added more than 8000 of her own specimens to the Herbarium, but encouraged others doing floristic surveys to “keep an eye out for the fungi!” She was happy to identify, record in her record books and add to the Herbarium the resulting specimens from these forays by others. In 1983 she and Dr. Richard Pohl, then Director of the Herbarium, negotiated the transfer of most of the mycological holdings (~25,000 specimens) of the University of Iowa Herbarium to ISU.

Table 1. Graduate students of Dr. Lois H. Tiffany

Ph.D.	
Haynes, James D.	1967
Richard, John L.	1968
McGinnis, Michael R.	1969
Nordahl, Shirley	1969
Malone, Carl	1972
Robinson, Philip Wayne	1975
Jensen, Roger Dean	1976
Klich, Maren A.	1980
Betancourr, Carlos	1981
Pinette, Robert John	1983
Millie, David Fred (co-major professor)	1984
Gabel, Audrey Coxbill Wacha	1985
Hall, Greenville Berkeley	1986
Niyo, Kayleen A. (co-major professor)	1987
Shearer, Judy F.	1988
Thorson, Peggy Rae (co-major professor)	1994
Weiser, Laura Anne (co-major professor)	2001
M.S.	
Brickler, Betty Jo	1960
Helin, Judith Ann	1961
Dawson, Floris	1965
Henry, Ellen Joyce	1969
Eastwood, Barbara	1969
Ruiz, Susan Elam	1970
Dyko, Barbara	1973
Getting, Rhonda	1973
Pinello, Christine B.	1976
Shipman, Jill	1977
Klich, Maren A.	1978
Porter, Jean Marie	1978
Wacha, Audrey Coxbill	1978
McDorman, Donald	1979
Dunlap, Dennis Michael	1979
Block, Charles	1979
Milla, Carmen	1980
Shearer, Judy Frederickson	1981
Pamperin, Debra Ann	1981
Jones, Susan Lynn	1983
Snetselaar, Karen M.	1989
Levings, Judy	1993
Heep, Erin J.	2002
Healy, Rosaria Ann	2002

She served in a variety of leadership and service capacities within and beyond ISU, including the leadership of various university committees, the Iowa Academy of Science, the Mycological Society of America, the American Phytopathological Society, Prairie States Mushroom Club, the Iowa Natural History Association, and other organizations.

She received numerous awards, including: first recipient of the Mycological Society of America W.H. Weston, Jr. Award for Teaching Excellence in Mycology (1980); Distinguished Iowa Scientist Award, Iowa Academy of Science (1982); first recipient of the Governor's Medal for Science Teaching (1982); ISU Teaching Excellence Award (1989); Iowa Women's Hall of Fame (1991); first VEISHEA Professor of the Year at ISU (1993, co-awarded to Dr. Knaphus); American Association of University Women Iowa Distinguished Faculty Award (1993); Distinguished Service Award, Iowa Academy of Science (1994); and most recently, an Honorary Outstanding Career Award at the



62nd meeting of the North Central Division of the American Phytopathological Society (2009).

She along with one of her students Judith Mathre discovered and described a new species of fungus, *Elsinoë panici*, a pathogen of the native prairie grass *Panicum virgatum*. She also had two fungi named in her honor; the first was *Melanospora tiffanii* Kowalski 1965, from a culture isolated from a leaf spot on brome grass that Dr. Tiffany made in 1954. A truffle (appropriately from Story County, Iowa), *Mattirolomyces tiffanyae* Healy, was named in her honor in 2003 by Rosanne Healy, her last graduate student.

Dr. Tiffany was asked how she managed to accomplish so much, especially in the early days of her career when she had to excel to earn respect as one of the few women scientists on campus, as well as be there for her family. Her reply was that she had long ago learned to compartmentalize her life and be fully present to the activities at hand. This not only explained how she achieved so much but also why she was reluctant to speak much about her personal life. Yet, despite her being a somewhat private person, her kindness, helpfulness and interest in others made her a wonderful colleague, mentor and friend to so many of us.

Publications authored or co-authored by Dr. Lois H. Tiffany

Books:

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