

IN MEMORIAM Virginia Rogers Ferris

August 13, 2017

Nematologist Virginia R. Ferris passed away Sunday, August 13, 2017 following a short illness. She was a full professor in the Department of Entomology at Purdue University. Dr. Ferris was born in Abilene, Kansas. She received a B.A. in botany in 1949 from Wellesley College, and her Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1954. Following graduation, she was an Assistant Professor at Cornell. When her husband and major collaborator Dr. John Ferris joined the Purdue faculty in 1958, Virginia set up a home lab and for several years conducted research as a freelance consultant. She was one of the world's foremost experts on the soybean cyst nematode when Purdue University hired her in 1965 as an Assistant Professor. She advanced to Associate Professor in 1970 and to Professor in 1974. Her administrative duties at Purdue included a four year term as Assistant Dean of the Graduate School, followed by three years as Assistant Provost.

Dr. Ferris received many awards in recognition of her outstanding academic achievements. At Wellesley she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi, and at Cornell she received a National Science Foundation Pre-Doctoral Fellowship. At Purdue she won the Helen B. Schleman Gold Medallion Award, which honors individuals for meaningful contributions to the promotion and advancement of female students. In 1988, she received the Alumnae Achievement Award from Wellesley College.

Dr. Ferris' early research and teaching were focused on systematics and ecology of soil and freshwater nematodes, with publications on quantification and analysis of whole ecosystems of nematodes in diverse habitats. An early mentor was Gerald Thorne, who tutored her in systematics of the Dorylaimida, leading to a series of systematic monographs on the subject. Eventually, her research shifted to plant-parasitic nematodes of particular interest to mid-west agriculture; her later projects centered around the systematics of cyst nematodes, plus a study of soybean resistance genes to soybean cyst nematode (SCN). Her research received consistent and strong funding from NSF, USDA-NRI, EPA, and commodity groups, and her many publications include journal articles, abstracts, book chapters, reviews, and a patent.



To those of us within the nematology community, Virginia was perhaps best known as a beloved founding member of the Society of Nematologists, which she served in many capacities throughout her career. In addition to her service on several SON committees, Dr. Ferris was chosen to serve as Secretary (1965-68), Vice-President (1968-69) and President (1969-70). She was an Associate Editor for the Journal of Nematology (1974-76), and co-Editor for early volumes of the Nematology Newsletter. In recognition of her many contributions to SON and for advancements in nematology, Dr. Ferris was elected Fellow of the Society (1985) and later chosen as an Honorary Member (2001). She was elected Fellow of the European Society of Nematologists (2002). She was a member of several

other scientific societies, including the American Phytopathological Society, Organization of Nematologists of Tropical America, and the Helminthological Society of Washington. She was also active in many other organizations and served two terms on the Board of Directors of the Association of Systematics Collections, and was a member of the Governing Council of the Society of Systematic Zoology (now the Society of Systematic Biology). She was elected to three six-year terms as a national Senator of Phi Beta Kappa and served on the PBK Senate Executive Committee for nine years.

Dr. Ferris was passionate about not only her scientific pursuits, but also about mentoring young people. Along

with her husband, Dr. Ferris served as a faculty fellow at Earheart Hall for nearly 30 years. Throughout her lengthy career at Purdue University she went out of her way to help smooth the way for other budding professionals, serving as a major professor for many graduate students and working long hours preparing them to defend their Ph.D. dissertations.

She is survived by two children, Jeffrey A. Ferris of Temecula California, and Susan Ferris Wyderko, of Rockville Maryland as well as three grandchildren, Jennifer Wyderko Gannon, Thomas John Wyderko, and James Joseph Wyderko.

Prepared by Andrea M. Skantar, Editor-in-Chief