

# HISTORY OF LOOMIS

**Professor Walter E. Loomis** (1898-1977) enjoyed a distinguished career at Iowa State University as professional leader, renowned teacher, and innovative and imaginative investigator in plant science. He was born near Makanda, Illinois, and raised on a farm devoted to woodlands and to fruit and vegetable production. His experiences as a youth profoundly influenced his approach to science and served him well in guiding ideas, conceived at the laboratory bench, to application in the farmer's field. After a year helping his father homestead a new farm in the Snake River Valley of Idaho and military service in France with the A.E.F., Walter Loomis returned to school and graduated in just two years with honors from the University of Illinois with a major in horticulture. He then enrolled at Cornell University as Professor H. C. Thompson's first Ph.D. student in vegetable crops. He began his own career in the new field of plant physiology with the completion of his Ph.D. thesis entitled "Studies in the transplanting of vegetable plants."

He came to Iowa State in 1927. His classic studies on translocation and photosynthesis and his comprehensive essays on differentiation and growth quickly established his reputation as an original thinker, resourceful experimenter, and advocate for the new field. His research and that of his students comprised a broad spectrum of disciplines. But his ability to explain the behavior of both managed and natural plant communities provided a strong common dimension. His keen insight was supported by great attention to detail and the application of innovative scientific methods. He maintained the "whole plant" perspective and his studies provided essential links to agriculture and forestry.

Professor Loomis was active in many professional organizations but was especially involved in the American Society of Plant Physiologists, a group he helped to organize. The influence of this organization is truly international; from its inception it has been a dominant force in contemporary plant physiology throughout the world. Professor Loomis held all elective offices in this society and served as its president in 1942-43. As monograph editor he was responsible for "Photosynthesis in Plants" (1949) and "Differentiation in Plants" (1953). In 1957 the society's prestigious Charles Reid Barnes Life Membership Award was conferred on Professor Loomis. Thousands of students have been introduced to botany through the lucid style of his text with Carl Wilson. A series of translations of this book have extended his influence on botanical education far beyond the borders of this country.

Professor Loomis was recognized for his ability to teach students at all levels. He approached both teaching and research with vigor and enthusiasm and developed concepts with models whose influences have been enduring. He left a legacy in the tradition he established in plant science at Iowa State. His living legacy -- his many devoted students and his two sons, Walter D. and Robert S. -- continue to yield ideas originally nurtured by his influence. We are proud that he was associated with the Department of Botany. The Interdepartmental Plant Biology Major represents the kind of interdisciplinary activity that was spawned by Professor Loomis's approach to plant physiology.

**The Walter E. and Helen Parke Loomis Fund**, established by the Loomis family, continues to support this lecture in memory of Walter and Helen. We hope that it will help preserve Walter Loomis's tradition for current and future generations of plant physiologists.