

A Tribute to IBRA L. CONNERS, 1894-1989

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Ibra Lockwood Connors was born on 5 July 1894 at Rodney, Elgin County, Ontario. He died at Lafayette, Indiana, on 12 May 1989. He received his B.A. from McMaster University in 1918. As an undergraduate he worked out of St. Catharines, Ontario, on the white pine blister rust survey. He earned his M.A. under J. H. Faull from Toronto in 1920. He then joined the Division of Botany and was posted to Brandon, Manitoba, by Dr. Güssow, to work on control of cereal smuts. He worked at Brandon until 1925, but spent one winter on graduate study at the University of Minnesota, and one at Saskatoon where he studied the rusts of the prairie provinces with W. P. Fraser. From Fraser he learnt the meticulous study methods demanded by these fungi, which stood him in good stead in later years. In 1925 he was transferred to Winnipeg, to study control of cereal smuts at the new rust research laboratory. In 1929 Dr. Güssow brought him to Ottawa specifically to take charge of the annual plant disease survey reports and the mycological herbarium. With his field and herbarium experience under W. P. Fraser, in addition to his academic training, Connors was well fitted to be curator of the herbarium. He promptly visited several major mycological herbaria in the United States. He thus avoided the dangerous mistakes often seen in small herbaria, and organized the herbarium with a system that was flexible enough to allow later expansion with little difficulty, for which his successors have been grateful.

The Canadian Plant Disease Survey had been operating, somewhat erratically, for nine years under several compilers. Mr. Connors quickly standardized the procedure for gathering data; and thenceforward the annual reports appeared with great regularity except for occasional delays in mimeographing. In all, he issued the reports for 28 years, 15 alone and 13 with co-compilers. Under him the Plant Disease Survey attained an enviable international reputation, largely because he would not accept a dubious report unless backed by a satisfactory specimen. In this way the survey also strengthened the mycological herbarium.

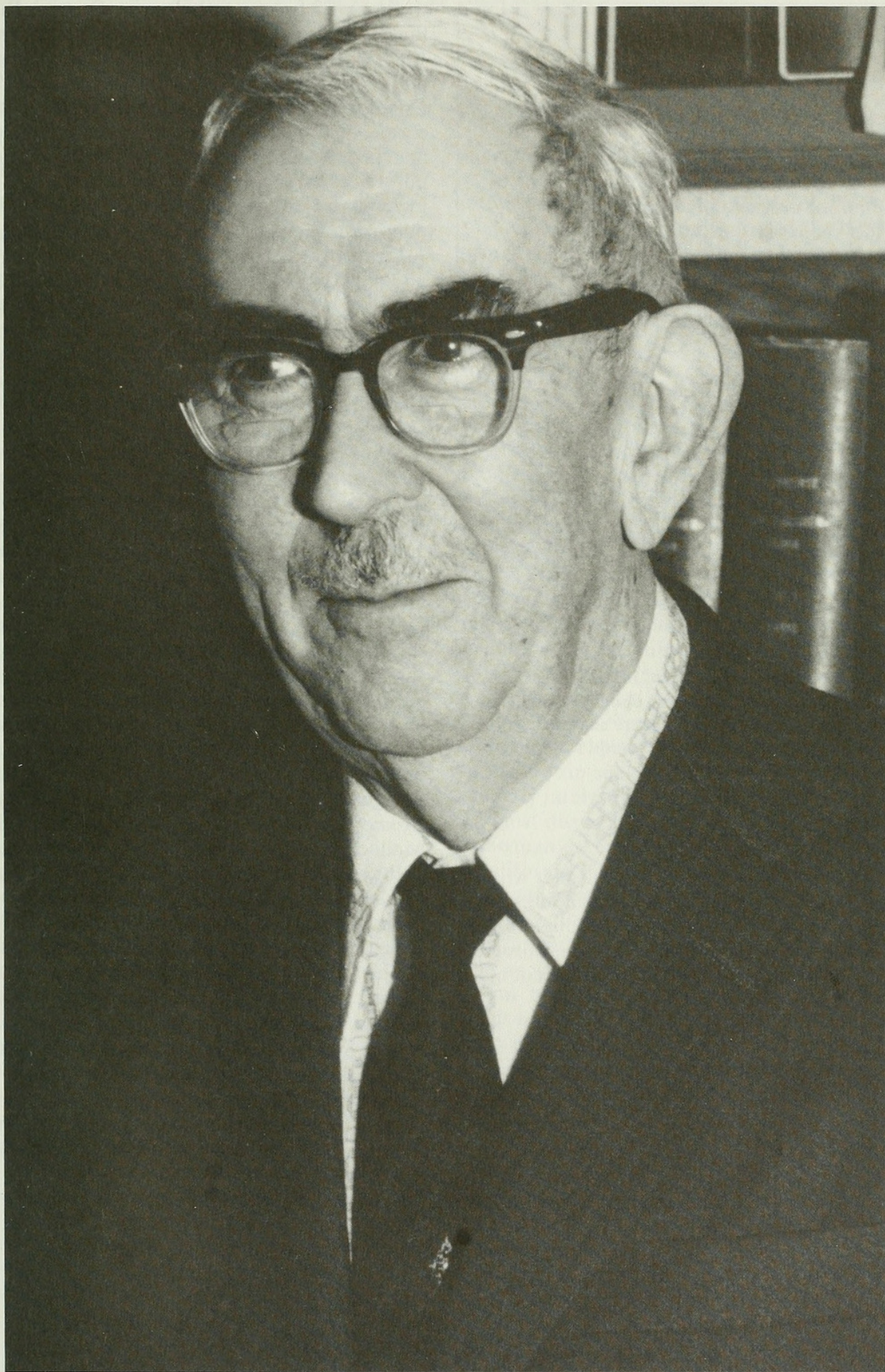
As curator of the mycological herbarium, alone

or with one assistant, Ibra was for many years an identification service, to whom were directed not only fungal specimens, but mite or insect damage, physiological disorders and even cyanobacteria and algae. In 1943, an army officer, worried about fungal damage to optical equipment, was brought up to us; and we were immediately plunged into a new war-born science called tropic-proofing, which finally led to redesigning optical instruments.

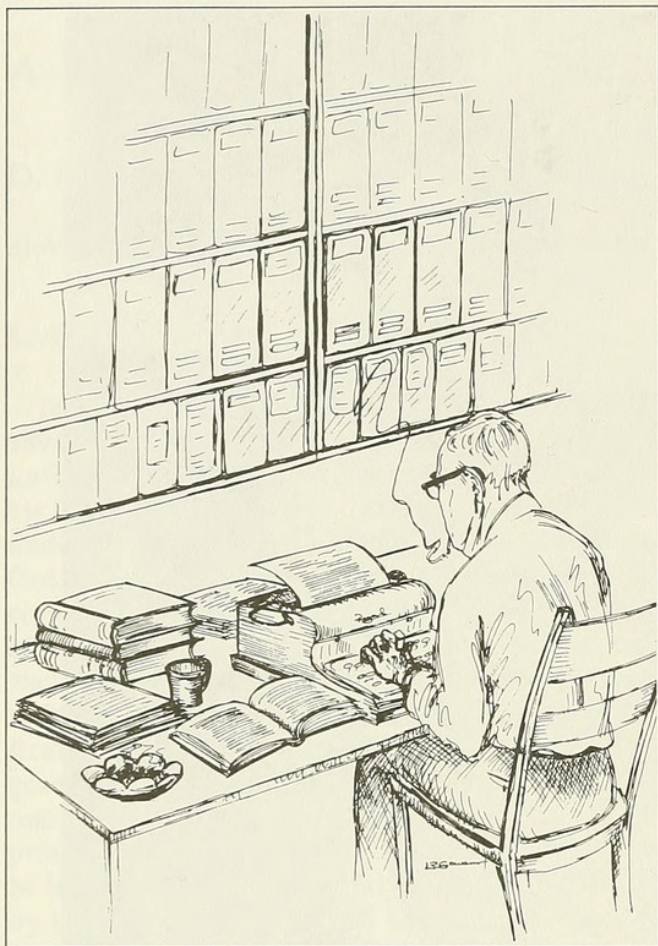
At a moment of frustration in 1950 he proposed the formation of a mycology section in the division, with J. W. Groves in charge. With active support from Harold Senn (remembered by club members as editor of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*) the proposal went through promptly; and in 1951 we became mycologists in name as well as in fact.

Starting in 1939, Ibra Connors was in charge of the registration of fungicides based on their biological effectiveness, which he did until 1962, two years after he reached retirement age. He had received a two-year extension specifically to let him finish a book, but the replacement, who worked only on fungicide registration, was not appointed until the extension period was over. People occasionally remarked that Ibra published few research papers. However, numerous research notes were included in the survey reports. Any doubting Thomas should look at the 45 cm of shelf space occupied by his 28 reports; and to him I would, unoriginally, say "Si monumentum requiris, circumspice!" And why did Connors ask for that extension? Yes, to finish a book, and despite the road blocks, and with the editorial help of Don Creelman, he did soon finish it; but, with printing delays, it did not appear until 1967: *An Annotated Index of Plant Diseases in Canada and Fungi Recorded on Plants in Alaska, Canada and Greenland*; one of the most valuable works in its field ever published.

At almost age 73, when the book appeared, did Ibra finally quit? No, indeed, he was already working full time on a daunting project: to assemble the original descriptions and illustrations, in photocopy, of all the genera of



A photograph of Ibra L. Connors, taken just before his 80th birthday by M. P. Corlett, showing him in spry middle age.



Sketch by Linda Gowans, made at about the same time as the photograph, shows Mr. Connors at work in typical pose. Dammit, we always said he would die young if he kept smoking.

fungi and their type species — a job that will not end as long as new genera continue to be described. Feeling, no doubt, that he had not enough to keep him busy, the Canadian Phytopathological Society urged him to gather first hand accounts of

the growth of plant pathology in Canada. Ibra, a long-standing C.P.S. member and president in 1937-38, travelled coast to coast in this endeavour and produced *Plant Pathology in Canada* (1972). Credited by the editorial committee with being its editor, he did in fact write or re-write most of it; and, in defence of such a meticulous author, I must point out that nearly all the errors in the text were inserted by the committee. A full list of his publications will be published in *Mycologia*.

Ibra worked steadily at his open-ended project on the genera of fungi until 1977; then, feeling the strain of keeping house for himself, he moved to West Lafayette, Indiana, where his daughter, Helen Crane, lives. There, for several years, until his health began to fail, he helped Dr. J. H. Hennen in the Arthur Herbarium at Purdue University.

Surely nobody could expect a man with two or three official jobs to have any serious outside interests. Well, it did not quite work out that way. Ibra joined The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club in 1933. He was club treasurer from 1943 to 1946, he was on council from 1943 to 1960, and he was an auditor from 1949 to 1961. He was also largely responsible for arranging for the club to sponsor the Audubon Screen Tours, which gave the club a substantial equity.

In 1979, the Canadian Botanical Association awarded Ibra Connors the Lawson Medal in recognition of his contributions to Canadian botany. In 1987, the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club made him an Honorary Member. The genus *Connersia* was named in his honour by Dave Malloch in 1974.

Ibra Connors was married in 1926 to Natalie Louise Thompson, of St. Paul, Minnesota, who died in 1967. He is survived by his daughter, Helen Crane of West Lafayette, Indiana, and a sister, Kathleen Malloch of St. Catharines, Ontario.



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