

# Remembering Donald Wyman

1904-1993

Donald Wyman, for thirty-five years Horticulturist of the Arnold Arboretum, died on September 6. From 1935 to 1970, Dr. Wyman was largely responsible for the care and maintenance of the living collections of the Arboretum. He grew up in Philadelphia and later described himself as a city boy who became interested in growing things in his room. He took a bachelor's degree in horticulture at Pennsylvania State College in 1926 and received a master's in forestry in 1933. On receiving a Ph.D. in horticulture at Cornell University in 1935, he joined the Arnold Arboretum, without pay for six months, and in 1936 was named Horticulturist. Richard Howard, director emeritus, commented that when Wyman came to the Arboretum as a young Cornell graduate, he undertook major responsibility for one of the principal arboretums in the world—at one of the worst times. Charles Sargent, the founding director, had died in 1927, and E. H. Wilson—thereafter Keeper of the Arboretum—met an untimely accidental death in 1930.

As Horticulturist, Dr. Wyman reinstated a comprehensive plant labeling and mapping program and initiated a judicious thinning of old and declining specimens. He also departed from the original method of planting only in botanical sequence, making exceptions when valued ornamental plants would be displayed well at a turn of the road or as the focal point of a vista. He saw his primary responsibility as the introduction of new plants. In 1960-1961 alone, he located seeds or plants of 586 species and varieties not then in the Arboretum. A trip to Europe in 1965 netted 930 species and varieties, many of them first-time introductions into the United States.

Wyman viewed arboreta as the best places to evaluate the ornamental qualities of trees and shrubs. It was in fulfilling this mission that Wyman established his reputation and for which he will long be remembered. More, perhaps, than any other single person, certainly of his era, he advanced the knowledge and appreciation of hardy woody plants through his articles (numbering in the hundreds), published in *Arnoldia* and elsewhere, and his seven books, which included the acclaimed *Shrubs and Vines for American Gardens*, *Trees for American Gardens*, and the bible of horticulturists, *Wyman's Gardening Encyclopedia*. With a personable style and a willingness to make unequivocal recommendations, he published comprehensive lists and then subdivided them into practical groupings recommended for special uses—shady spots, urban environments, seaside landscapes. A synthesizer and popularizer, he translated a great deal of technical information into a form nonprofessionals could understand. His work may now seem familiar, but only because it's been so often imitated.

His achievements did not go unrecognized. He was president, director, and trustee of the American Horticultural Society and trustee of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. He was awarded the Liberty Hyde Bailey Medal, the foremost honor of the American Horticultural Society; the George Robert White Medal, the top honor of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society; and the Veitch Memorial Gold Medal, the highest award available to a foreigner, from the Royal Horticultural Society of London.

In an interview at age eighty-seven he remembered, "At a certain point in my studies, I had to choose which area of horticulture to devote myself to, and I chose to concentrate on ornamental woody plants. When I came to the Arboretum, there they all were, needing loving care and attention. I enjoyed working at the Arboretum. I loved every bit of it."