

OBITUARIES

LESLIE EDWARD WOSTALL CODD (1908–1999)

Leslie Edward Wostall Codd (Figure 1) was born at Vants Drift in KwaZulu-Natal on 16th September 1908. He matriculated at Dundee High School, and from 1925 to 1928 continued his studies at Natal University College, graduating in 1928 with an M.Sc. with a first class in botany. A year later he won the Webb Research Scholarship and continued his studies at Cambridge University, where he studied genetics under Professor Engeldon in 1929. In 1930 a Colonial Agriculture Scholarship took him to the Imperial College of Agriculture, Trinidad, where he worked on the genetics of cotton. He was employed as a plant breeder in the Department of Agriculture, British Guiana during the period 1931 to 1936. Here he met and married Cynthia Schmeidersmann, a marriage which was to last for 65 years.

In January 1937 he joined the Pasture Research Section in the Division of Plant Industry, of the Department of Agriculture in Pretoria. Subsequently during 1939 he was appointed Officer in Charge of Prinshof Grass Breeding Station in Pretoria, a station concerned with the selection, growing and testing of pasture grasses. Four years later he obtained a D.Sc. degree at the University of South Africa, for a thesis on rice breeding.

In 1945 Dr Codd was appointed as Officer in Charge of the Botanical Survey Section in the Division of Botany, and remained stationed at Prinshof Experiment Station. This heralded the start of a career as a botanist spanning 28 years. During the time that he was in charge of the Botanical Survey Section and undertaking botanical collections (Figure 2) in the Northern Province, he became thoroughly acquainted with the flora of these areas, a knowledge which was to form the basis on which his later taxonomic research was founded. Plant collecting in the Kruger National Park culminated in his book *Trees and shrubs of the Kruger National Park* (Codd 1951)—one of the bestsellers in the *Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa* series. Several publications on ecological subjects appeared under his authorship during this period.

In 1951 the Division of Botany and Plant Pathology was split into two, namely the Division of Plant Pathology and the Division of Botany. In that year, following the retirement of Dr Inez Verdoorn, Dr Codd was placed in charge of the National Herbarium. In 1956 he was appointed Assistant Chief of the Division of Botany, which was later renamed the Botanical Research Institute. On Dr Dyer's retirement in 1963, Dr Codd was appointed Director of the Botanical Research Institute, a post he held until his retirement in 1973.

From the time of his appointment in the organization, Dr Codd was made responsible for the development of the Botanical Garden established by the previous director, Dr R.A. Dyer. For many years this project received his special attention. His constant support and encour-

agement, his interest and his live plant collections have contributed immensely to the growth of the Botanical Garden. Particularly during the period in which he was head of Botanical Survey, he was continually on the lookout for interesting and colourful plants which he collected and had grown in the Botanical Garden for painting and publication in *The Flowering Plants of Africa* series. In fact, Volume 43 of this series is dedicated to Dr Codd in recognition of this achievement and it records: 'His special interest in the development of the Pretoria National Botanic Garden, has contributed so much to South African Botany'.

During Dr Codd's tenure of office as Director, the BRI steadily grew. This is borne out by the fact that during 1966, following a public service inspection of the Institute, two new sections were created, namely a Flora Research Section and an Economic Botany Section. Further, a Plant Structure and Function Laboratory was created in 1969. The number of staff employed rose significantly during the following years.

The campaign for a new building, started by the previous Director, Dr R.A. Dyer, was vigorously promoted by Dr Codd, and in 1973, nearly 15 years after its initiation, a new milestone was reached when the Botanical



FIGURE 1.—Leslie Edward Wostall Codd (1908–1999).



FIGURE 2.—Dr Codd preparing specimens for pressing in camp, during the Bernard Carp Expedition to Barotseland, Zambia, August 1952.

Research Institute moved to the new building situated in the Botanical Garden.

As Director and Editor of the publications of the Botanical Research Institute, Dr Codd made significant contributions. Under his leadership, strength in scientific publications became a feature of this Institute. He personally provided the description of sixty-seven of the species depicted in *The Flowering Plants of Africa* series, eight of which were new to science. Plant groups which received his concentrated attention were, amongst others the genera *Albizia*, *Kniphofia*, *Erythrina*, *Schotia*, *Cassine*, the family Apocynaceae, and in later years, partly after his retirement, the family Lamiaceae. A large part of his research appeared in *Bothalia*, the house journal of the former Botanical Research Institute and of the present National Botanical Institute. His contributions to the *Flora of southern Africa* series are significant and cover the families Apocynaceae, Canellaceae, Loasaceae, the large family Lamiaceae and the genus *Cleome* (with L.E. Kers).

He possessed to a marked degree, that special gift, inherent in all successful taxonomists, of recognising and storing in his memory, the defining characters of plants and plant specimens and applying this knowledge to research. His taxonomic work has remained largely unchallenged and represents an extremely valuable contribution to South African botanical literature.

He also had the special gift of writing clearly, concisely and fluently with very little revision. This facilitated the work of the editorial staff, a fact commented on to me (B. de W.) on a number of occasions, possibly after receiving some of my own manuscripts.

His publications number 162 and include many taxa which were new to science. He is commemorated in the following: The genus *Coddia*, *Agapanthus coddii*, *Berkheya coddii*, *Brachystelma coddii*, *Erythrina* × *coddii*, *Eulophia coddii*, *Kniphofia coddiana*, *Lobelia coddii*, *Macrotyloma coddii*, *Rhus coddii*, *Tulbaghia coddii* and *Tylophora coddii*.

Dr Codd's contributions to Botany include plant collections numbering nearly 11 000 with many new records

and new species among them. His collecting has always been meticulous, particularly his labelling, and colleagues frequently stated that his field notes have often enabled them to return to the exact spot in the veld to find the plants from which he had collected. His extensive contributions in the form of live plant collections to the Pretoria Botanical Garden have already been mentioned. His main collection is deposited in the National Herbarium in Pretoria. Duplicates can be found in the Kew Herbarium, London, the Zürich Herbarium, Botanische Staatssammlung München, Geneva Herbarium and others.

Unlike many scientists, Dr Codd was an extremely helpful person, who was prepared to spend time to share his expertise with colleagues and other persons seeking advice. Numerous amateur botanists including Eve Palmer, Colonel Charles Scott and many other persons have benefited from his expertise. Very few of the botanical books published during the last two decades before the nineties appeared without some reference to encouragement and advice received by the authors from him.

Dr Codd played a major role in the affairs of scientific societies, becoming the president of several of them. He was intimately concerned with the establishment of the South African Association of Botanists, was a founder member and became its first president and an honorary life member. An active member of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science, he served on its Council for many years, ultimately becoming President of Section B (Botany) during 1957–1958. A strong supporter of the South African Biological Society, he made significant contributions, served on its Council for many years also as President in 1961 and was elected honorary member in 1985, the first to achieve this honour. As a long-standing member of the Botanical Society of South Africa he was elected honorary life member.

The excellence of his research was recognised in the awards of The South African Medal of the South African Association of Science in 1977, the Medal for Botany by the South African Association of Botanists in 1979, and the Senior Captain Scott Memorial Medal of the South African Biological Society in 1982. In December 1983

he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Science by the University of the Witwatersrand and in March 1990 an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Natal. In the eulogy preceding the latter award, he was described as: 'a gifted botanist, possessing a rare combination of qualities—acute perception and intuition, a disciplined scientific mind, painstaking thoroughness and a fine aesthetic sense.'

Dr Codd was an accomplished sportsman, played rugby for Cambridge and captained the Trinidad Rugby Team. He was a gentle person, full of humour, always fair, appreciative of work well done and a person it was a pleasure to work with and for. He genuinely appreciated the objects of his studies, and was quite prepared to delight in simple things. Many of his colleagues, staff and friends will recall anecdotes, most of them humorous, which they associate with him. Leo Jones, his technical assistant in the Prinshof days, was a great teller of tales, much appreciated by Dr Codd, who would laugh, in his special way, until the tears ran. One of us (B. de W.) remembers an early morning in the lowveld travelling on a sandy narrow track, hemmed in by tall grass, heavily covered with dew. Suddenly a francolin appeared in front of the car and waddled frantically down the road refusing to enter the wet grass to get out of the way. The movement of this little bird, very reminiscent of a fat lady running hard, was so ludicrous that we burst out laughing. For several hundred yards two grown men were laughing uproariously at a small bird! There was a special feeling between us that day. We had shared something simple and pleasant.

In his passing on the 2nd March 1999, botany has lost a special talent, but the legacy left behind is a life rich in contributions made in the pursuit of the knowledge of our plant environment.

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