Science Societies

In memoriam

September 24, 2020



J. Douglas Helms



Doug Helms

The life and legacy of USDA-NRCS historian Doug Helms, who passed away in December 2018, has been celebrated and memorialized within the agricultural history community. But Doug also rubbed elbows with, and ably offered support to, the soil scientist community in general. That presence, and outstretched hand of help, was particularly appreciated by the soil science practitioners who joined him in delving into the fascinating history of our field.

The use of archival materials, the concept of historical context, and other fundamentals of historical research and scholarship, are typically uncharted territory for most of us. Doug was always available with invaluable tips, contacts, etc. He was the go-to guy.

He knew the USDA collections at the National Archives and the USDA National Agricultural Library like the back of his hand. His book (with USDA colleagues Anne Effland and Patricia Durana)—*Profiles in the History of the U.S. Soil Survey* (Iowa State University Press, 2002)—remains as a living legacy and has been a springboard for much of the recent historical work by American soil science practitioners. Additionally, and indeed monthly, his historical contributions to the NRCS Soils Planners have enriched all of our lives.

I visited his office, overlooking Independence Avenue in Washington, DC just one time—the volume of paper and Doug's ability to sort through it and come up with gems

was simply amazing.

In life, we tend to seek out the unique—in people, places, food, teams, leaders, and thoughts. This is especially true in times of physical and intellectual challenge. We bake sourdough, not white bread. Doug was sourdough with a side of grits—a truly unique, Southern gentleman.

From all of us, thanks Doug.

—Submitted by Edward R. Landa, University of Maryland

Sarah Elizabeth Lingle

ASA Fellow Dr. Sarah Elizabeth Lingle, 64, of Salem, OR, passed away on 17 Apr. 2020. She had lived fully and courageously with cancer for more than a decade. Lingle was born on 22 July 1955 in Davis, CA and grew up in Modesto, CA. She graduated from the University of California–Davis in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in Genetics and then went on to earn a master's in Agronomy from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and a Ph.D. in Agronomy from Washington State University. She married Thomas Pratt Washington in McAllen, TX on 20 May 1989.

Lingle worked as a plant scientist for the USDA-ARS from 1984 to 2011, first in Weslaco, TX and then in New Orleans, LA. She specialized in sugarcane and sorghum research and published numerous articles in scientific journals. She served on numerous committees for the Societies, including the Women in Science Committee, chairing it from 1992–1993, the CSSA Board of Directors from 1993–1994, and the *Crop Science* Editorial Board from 1994–1997. Upon retirement, she chose Salem, OR as her new home.

Throughout her life, Lingle was both a devoted scientist and a devout Episcopalian. She joined St. Paul's Episcopal Church when she moved to Salem and was warmly welcomed into their faith community. She had a very active mind and wide-ranging interests. She traveled extensively, was a voracious reader, loved gardening and bird watching, adored her cats, kept up with a host of Facebook friends, and was writing her first novel. Lingle was kind, generous, resilient, brave, and an inspiration to the many people who knew and loved her.

Her parents and husband preceded her in death. She is survived by her sister-in-law Esther (Robert) Schnase of San Antonio, TX; brothers-in-law Lawrence Washington of Bloomington, IN and Aubrey (Lynn) Washington of Norman, OK; and many beloved extended family members and friends.

Morris G. Merkle

Morris Merkle passed away on 17 May 2020. He was born 23 July 1934 in Lincoln, AL and raised on the family farm in Talladega County. He received a B.S. degree (Agricultural Science) in 1955 and an M.S. degree (Agronomy-Weed Science) in 1959 from Auburn University. From January 1956 to January 1958, he was in Germany with the 868th Field Artillery Battalion unit as a first lieutenant. He received a Ph.D. degree (Agronomy-Weed Science) in 1963 from Cornell University.

As a graduate student at Cornell, Merkle spent six months in Midland, MI at Dow Chemical learning how to run a new analytical instrument called a gas chromatograph. With that knowledge, he was hired in 1963 with USDA-ARS as part of a research unit at Texas A&M University to study and develop control programs for mesquite and huisache. Based on a very strong desire to teach students, he transferred in 1966 to the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences at Texas A&M University. During his teaching career, he taught 1,166 undergraduates and was the major professor for 84 M.S. and 53

Ph.D. students.

His research program was second to none. His grantsmanship early in his career was very beneficial to the department when funds were scarce. He served as president of the Southern Weed Science Society and was Fellow of the Weed Science Society of America. Based on his vast knowledge, he was a member of Operation Ranchland that developed vegetation control strategies for the U.S. Military during the Vietnam War. On a personal note, he was a student of the stock market with a full understanding of its short comings.

Dr. Merkle was known for many colorful quotes. Among them were: “If it looks like duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck.” And, “If a mule kicks you, it’s the mule’s fault the first time; the second time, it’s your fault.”

To our surprise, Dr. Merkle choose to retire early in 1990, citing personal reasons. Later in retirement, Morris revealed that he had trouble making his feet go the direction he desired. The slow progression of Parkinson’s had fully arrived.

Dr. Merkle is survived by his wife of more than 57 years, Jean Carol; children, Charles Donald, George Ashley, and Page Marie; grandchildren, Lance Andrew, Christopher Ryan, and Nicholas Kyle.

—Submitted by J. Mike Chandler

Owen J. Newlin



Owen Newlin

ASA and CSSA Fellow Owen J. Newlin, a member of ASA and CSSA for more than 65 years, died on 12 July 2020 in Des Moines, IA. Born 6 Feb. 1928, in Des Moines, Newlin dedicated his entire life to his family and helping farmers feed the world. While a student at Iowa State University, he met Doris Jean ("D.J.") Coxon, and they were married on 19 July 1952. They had four children. He received a B.S. in Agronomy and a M.S. in Crop Production from Iowa State University. He also earned a Ph.D. in Plant Breeding and Genetics from the University of Minnesota in 1955. He was a 1974 graduate of Harvard University's Advanced Management Program.

Newlin joined Pioneer Hi-Bred International in 1955 as a research assistant in the production department of the Central Division. He became production manager for the division in 1964 and served as president of the Central Division from 1967 to 1978. He was elected vice president of Pioneer in 1978, senior vice president in 1986, and he retired from Pioneer in 1993.

One of Newlin's most important contributions was his decision in 1971 at Pioneer to substantially increase the planned production of hybrid number 3780 very early in its introduction. The company made an enormous jump from producing 10,000 bags to 500,000 bags in one year. The risk paid off as Pioneer sold more than 20 million bags of hybrid 3780 over its 17-year period, allowing the company to dramatically increase

its market share for many years.

In 1975, 1976, and 1977 he raised funds from agribusinesses to support a referendum for a Corn Checkoff in Iowa. After two unsuccessful efforts, in 1977 the Iowa Corn Growers Association passed a Corn Checkoff. Over the next few years, he also raised funds to support similar successful referendums in Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Ohio.

Newlin served on numerous professional and academic boards and committees, including those for the American Seed Research Foundation, American Seed Trade Association, U.S. Grains Council, State of Iowa, Simpson College, and the Agronomic Science Foundation among many others. He has received many awards over his career.

Newlin is survived by his wife Doris Jean; his children, Tamara (Ed) Gregori of Fort Collins, CO, John (Patty Carton) Newlin of Brunswick, ME, and Christine (Rick) Kovach of Scottsdale, AZ; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents, Jay and Ruth (Owen) Newlin; his sisters, Emily (Newlin) Bay and Vesta (Newlin) Hansen; and his daughter Janet Newlin.

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