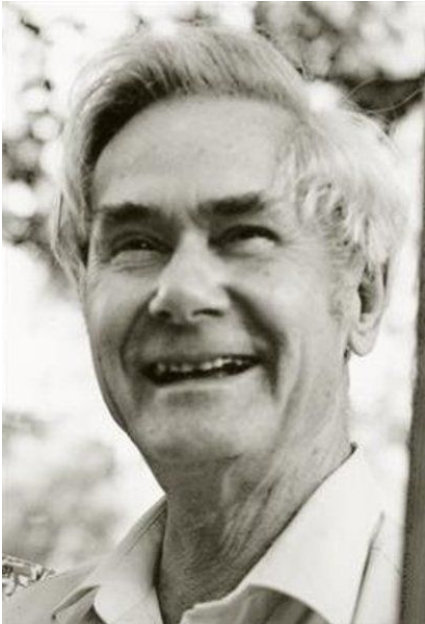


From HeraldTimesOnline.com

April 27, 2016

John Randolph Preer, Jr., 98



APRIL 4, 1918—APRIL 22, 2016

BLOOMINGTON — Retired Indiana University Biology Professor John R. Preer, Jr., a pioneering geneticist and a teacher who inspired generations of scientists, died April 22 at his home in Bloomington. He was 98.

In a career spanning seven decades, Dr. Preer conducted innovative research that expanded the knowledge of how microorganisms live, compete, and reproduce. With his wife, the late Dr. Louise B. Preer, working with him in the laboratory, he developed techniques and tools that broke new ground in the study of paramecia, a singlecell organism that was the focus of his research throughout his career.

“John was a towering figure in the field of protozoan genetics,” said IU Distinguished Biology Professor Michael Lynch. “Many of the methods he invented moved the fields of genetics and epigenetics forward in important ways. He also educated an impressive lineage of students who remain the leaders in the field.”

Dr. Preer was a member of the Indiana University faculty from 1968 to 1988. For nearly two decades after his formal retirement, he maintained a laboratory and conducted research.

A prolific writer, Dr. Preer published widely in scientific journals throughout his career. His last publication, which he co-authored at age 90, was a book, “Paramecium: Genetics and Epigenetics.”

He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1976, and shortly afterward was named a distinguished professor at IU. University President Michael A. McRobbie awarded him the President’s Medal for Excellence in 2011, citing his lifetime contributions in biology. The University of Westfälische WilhelmsUniversität, in Munster, Germany, conferred an honorary doctorate in the natural sciences in 1993.

He first came to Indiana University as a graduate student in 1939 to study taxonomy under Alfred Kinsey. About the time that Kinsey’s research interests were shifting from gall wasps to human sexuality, John Preer decided to turn his focus to

protozoology. He studied under an inspiring young geneticist, Tracy Sonneborn, and received his doctoral degree from Indiana in 1947.

Dr. Preer was born in 1918 in Ocala, Fla., to John and Ruth (Williams) Preer. From a very young age, he seemed destined to be a scientist. According to a memoir penned by his wife, he knew even as a toddler that he wanted to “study bugs.” Growing up in rural central Florida, he loved to fish and hunt, and he owned a horse he would ride bareback.

Coming of age during the Depression, he found his commitment to science growing. To pursue his studies, he left home while still in high school and moved to a boardinghouse in Gainesville, Florida, where he worked with University of Florida entomologist J.R. Watson studying thrips, a tiny insect that eats vegetation and is considered an agricultural pest.

After graduating from high school, he continued working on thrips as a University of Florida undergraduate, becoming proficient at identifying and classifying the insects. He published his first scientific journal article on the taxonomy of thrips at age 20, and before graduating from college in 1939 had discovered two previously unknown species of thrips and one new genus, which was named *Preeriella* after him.

As a first-year graduate student at Indiana, he met another doctoral student, Louise “Bertie” Brandau, and the two began a romance that would last nearly three-quarters of a century.

They married at her home in Baltimore in November 1941, but Pearl Harbor—and the military draft—soon intervened. He served as a medical clerk in the U.S. Army in England but after several months returned to the United States to attend Officers’ Candidate School. He was commissioned as a lieutenant and then was assigned to a base in Texas, where he instructed bomber pilots in a high-altitude training unit.

After the war, he resumed his studies at Indiana. Upon receiving his doctorate, he accepted a faculty post at the University of Pennsylvania. He worked there for 20 years before returning to Indiana, establishing the laboratory where he would conduct his most important work.

His scientific contributions, especially identifying paramecium’s anomalies in replicating DNA, not only influenced the study of that microorganism but brought a new geneintroducing methodology to the field of genetics, improving the technique in laboratories around the world.

“He taught me so much, not just about science, but how to live,” said a long-time colleague, Bertina Rudman of Bloomington, who assisted Dr. Preer in his labs at Penn and at IU and who coauthored many of his papers.

After long days in the lab, Dr. Preer might lead his team out for an evening jog or a picnic supper at Lake Monroe. He and Bertie often hosted “silver night,” where Biology Department students and staff crafted jewelry or furniture, baked, or undertook other projects.

A creative tinkerer and relentless learner, he built two large telescopes and stargazed, creating legions of amateur astronomers in his neighborhood; learned to sail and owned several boats, including a 26-foot sloop that he and Bertie sailed around Long Island Sound during a sabbatical at Yale University; and tirelessly assisted Bertie with the hundreds of orchids she raised in a greenhouse at their home.

When his sons were young, he nurtured their interests, whether in science, music, sports, or scouting, and he patiently taught all four of his grandchildren to drive. After his wife’s death in 2013, he organized the memoirs she had written and had the collection, “Bertie’s Stories,” published in book form.

John is survived by his son James and his wife, Jean, and his son Robert and his wife, Adele Foy; grandchildren Genevieve (Linus Tsai), Stephen Preer (Vis Taraz), Lily (Jonathan Sonis), and Sam Preer; greatgrandchildren Satchel Tsai, Oscar Tsai, Audrey Preer, and Nora Taraz; and a host of loving family members, friends, and neighbors.

A memorial service for Dr. Preer is scheduled for 3 p.m. on May 7 at the Day & DeremiahFrye Funeral Home, 4150 E. 3rd St., Bloomington. Visitation will precede the service starting at 2 p.m.

Contributions in his memory can be made online to Indiana University's Biology Enrichment Fund <http://www.bio.indiana.edu/alumni/support/> or by mail to the IU Foundation, 1500 N. State Road 46, Bloomington, IN 47408.

Online condolences may be made to www.DayDeremiahFrye.com.