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Remembering Rosalind Morris

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Remembering Rosalind Morris

Longtime NOU member Mary Rosalind Morris passed away in Lincoln on March 26, 2022, at the age of 101. She was born in Ruthin, Wales, May 8, 1920, but the family moved to Canada in 1925. They eventually settled on a fruit farm near the town of Forest in western Ontario.

Rosalind earned a B.S. in agriculture at the Ontario Agricultural College (now the University of Guelph), after which she accepted a graduate assistantship in the Plant Breeding Department at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Her thesis research involved genetic studies on buckwheat, an important cover crop in the region.

After receiving a Ph.D. from Cornell in 1946, Rosalind began a career that lasted 43 years in the University of Nebraska Agronomy Department, teaching graduate courses and doing research. Her first research examined the effects of radiation on corn, which had become a concern after World War II. In order to advance her knowledge in this area, she spent the year 1949-1950 on a University of Nebraska fellowship at the California Institute of Technology and several months in 1956-1957 in Sweden and England on a Guggenheim fellowship.



Upon her return to Nebraska in 1957 she joined the wheat research team, and the rest of her career was devoted to developing and testing chromosome-substitution lines in bread wheat varieties. Current wheat breeding research at the University of Nebraska would be impossible without the set of unique wheat lines Rosalind developed. Her gene substitution work resulted in many of the modern varieties of bread wheat which are consumed all over the world today and helped alleviate food insecurity among the populations that depended exclusively on rice as a staple of their diet.

An indication of the significance of her work is that in 1979 she was named a Fellow of the American Society of Agronomy, and was the first woman to receive that honor. She was a trailblazer for women in science, and especially in agronomy.

After retirement Rosalind traveled in the United States and abroad, often with her friend Mary Lou Pritchard. She was proud of her Welsh heritage and was a member of the St. David's Welsh Society of Nebraska.

Her membership in the NOU spanned decades, and she held the offices of vice president (1960), president (1975), librarian (1988-1989) and NBR editor (1992-1997). She was also a member of the Friends of Wilderness Park, Lincoln Naturalist Club, Wachiska Audubon, and the Nature Conservancy. For many years while on walks with her dog she picked up litter in Lincoln parks and on campus and received several environmental stewardship awards for her efforts. She is remembered by those who knew her as a teacher, a naturalist, a birder and a friend.

Editor's note: This article is based on information published by the Lincoln Journal Star and on personal comments from Thomas Labeledz and other NOU friends.