

## Jacob Richard Schramm, Director of Morris Arboretum 1939-1954

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Dr. Schramm was Director of Morris Arboretum during trying times. Fortunately, he was well-prepared to handle challenges, given his prior experience as a founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Botanical Abstracts*, then fund-raising to expand the series to other biology fields, while teaching at Cornell. Such a massive undertaking requires superior organizational skills, attention to detail and much patience—attributes Schramm developed early on, when he held dual positions as Assistant Director of the Missouri Botanical Garden and instructor at Washington University and pursued a Ph.D.

Eight years into the abstracts project, Schramm launched *Biological Abstracts* with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and moved headquarters from Cornell to the University of Pennsylvania. When funding ceased in 1937, Schramm continued work without pay for a year, then gained appointment as Professor of Botany at the University of Pennsylvania. Within two years, he was asked to head three University entities: the Botany Department, the UPenn Botanical Garden and Morris Arboretum.

Schramm had barely begun his tenure when he was confronted with the realities of World War II. Several Arboretum staff members were called into service in war-time industry and research, including Joseph Adams, herbarium curator and Henry Skinner, plant curator. Propagation tasks were taken on by James Lambert, superintendent of the UPenn Botanical Garden. Two staff who remained at the Arboretum added a new duty—air-raid warden. Regrettably, fewer staff and shifting responsibilities meant that Schramm was forced to suspend publication of the *Morris Arboretum Bulletin*, the Arboretum's means of communication with associates and colleagues, for several years.

Not only were staff pressed into the war effort, so was the land. Lawns at Compton and Bloomfield were plowed up and turned into Victory gardens. Beef cattle grazed in the meadows and the woods became the site of genetics experiments for the U.S. Forestry Service. The

grounds became a respite for war-weary Philadelphians and wounded service members convalescing at the Overlea estate on Meadowbrook Lane.

Despite severe reduction of federal funding for forest research during the war, the number of projects increased for the regional U.S. Forest Service experiment station, whose staff was housed at the Arboretum. Schramm served as research consultant to one of the projects, a multi-year study of plant colonization in southern PA's anthracite region. His research culminated in a report to the American Philosophical Society on the ecology of mining wastes.

On the UPenn campus, botany department responsibilities shifted as well. Several faculty participated in emergency research on production of synthetic rubber for military use and Drs. Fogg, Wherry and Zirkle, who had set up the Arboretum's research program in 1933, taught courses in accelerated programs for military technical specialists.

After the war, the Arboretum and the forest experiment station began a joint project to establish a comprehensive collection of oak trees at Bloomfield farm. Collaborators across the country submitted acorns of 40 species for comparative studies of growth and performance to the lead investigators, Schramm and Ernst J. Schreiner, the station's geneticist. In subsequent years, analytical reports by research staff provided vital information about variation within oak species. Other post-war projects involved studies of organic fungicides in treating Arboretum shade trees and selenium for treatment of boxwood pests.

As the number of research projects increased, office and laboratory space became a priority for Schramm. Thanks to the strong support of Thomas S. Gates, President Emeritus of UPenn, the Arboretum acquired the Overlea estate in 1948 and Schramm superintended the move of herbarium, laboratories, library and offices from the Compton mansion into Overlea (renamed Gates Hall). That same year, the Baxter Memorial, a circular brick overlook with low balustrade, was constructed in honor of Fairmount Park's arborist on a plateau between the rose garden and the hill & water garden.

During Schramm's 15-year tenure as Arboretum director, his wife, Dr. Mildred Webster Spargo Schramm, served as Secretary of the International Cancer Research Foundation and Advisory Board Chair of AACR's *Cancer Research* journal. At the end of the war, she organized a statewide system of cancer clinics in North Carolina.

It's worth noting that Jacob Schramm and Mildred Spargo earned a Ph.D. in botany at Washington University the same year, yet they had distinctly different careers. In 1954, when Schramm reached UPenn's mandatory retirement age, he and Mildred moved to Indiana University where he was appointed research scholar.

Learn more:

"Jacob Richard Schramm," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, Vol. 86 (1976), 57-58. [Archive.org](#).

William Campbell Steere, *Biological Abstracts/BIOSIS: The First Fifty Years*. 1976. [Archive.org](#).