Contributor to Systematic Microbiology

NORMAN EDWIN GIBBONS

1906–1977

The Canadian bacteriologist Norman Gibbons has been an influential figure in microbiology and an important contributor to systematic bacteriology. We are sad to record that he died on 10 December 1977 in Lakeland Fla., where he retreated from the cold and snows of the Ottawa winter. He will be missed by his friends throughout the world of microbiology who knew him for his pioneer work on the halophilic bacteria, for his interest in systematic bacteriology, and for his devotion to encouraging effective international effort among biologists and microbiologists. His influence will persist in these areas, but the well-founded and sensible direction and advice that was so unstintingly given by Norman Gibbons will be sorely missed.

He was born and brought up in Niagara Falls, Ontario and went from there to Queens University (Kingston, Ontario), where he took his B.A. (1927) and M.A. (1928). It was there that he was introduced to bacteriology and to a fellow student, Alice Bennie, both of whom he espoused for life. Graduate studies at Yale University (Ph.D., 1932) was followed by a 5-year stint at the Fisheries Experimental Station in Halifax, Nova Scotia, during which he developed his interest in food microbiology and the prevention of spoilage. The greatest part of his research life was spent in the laboratories of the National Research Council of Canada in Ottawa. He

joined the Division of Biology and Agriculture, later the Division of Applied Biology, in 1937 and remained there until his retirement in 1969. From 1959 to 1969, he was Assistant Director of the Division.

He was very active in research and was a major force in maintaining a strong and productive microbiological section in his Division. Interest and necessity directed him to continue studies of the spoilage of fish, eggs, and bacon, but his observations in these areas stimulated his more academic and very productive research programs on halophilic bacteria, on freeze-drying, and on psychrophiles. His studies of halophiles were long continued and stimulated studies throughout the world; they also stimulated his interest in classification and taxonomy.

His post in the National Research Council was not without administrative responsibility. In fact, his services were in demand for the discharge of the many other activities of the Council including its function as a national granting agency and as a national body interacting on the international scene. His scholarly distinctions brought him election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (of which he was Honorary Treasurer for 3 years) and the Canadian Society of Microbiologists Award in 1959, and his all-around contributions brought Honorary Membership in the American Society for Microbiology in 1974. His keen interest in microbiology and microbiologists in Canada made him the leader of a small group of colleagues who stimulated and encouraged the foundation of the Canadian Society of Microbiologists in 1950–1951, of which he was the first Secretary-Treasurer and which he guided to maturity through its first decade. He was the prime mover in initiating the *Canadian Journal of Microbiology* in 1954. It was his broad experience of the varied aspects of microbiology, microbiologists, and the international scene that prompted his election as Secretary-General of the 8th International Congress of Microbiology held in Montreal in 1962 and his becoming in 1966 the Secretary-General and Treasurer of the International Association of Microbiological Societies. He served in that function with distinction and ended his term in 1974.

In 1965 Norman Gibbons was asked to join

the Board of Trustees of *Bergey's Manual of Determinative Bacteriology*, which was then under the Chairmanship of R. E. Buchanan, and he was a most valued member. They were engaged in preparing for the long-delayed 8th edition of the *Manual*. There was much strenuous work to be done and frustrating delays before the task was completed; in fact, completion might have been threatened but for the remarkable energy and devotion that Norman Gibbons gave to the project. In 1969 he took an early retirement from the National Research Council in order to devote a large proportion of his time to being co-editor of the *Manual* with Dr. Buchanan, whose health and strength was beginning to decline, and he took over the entire task on Dr. Buchanan's death in 1973. His great capacity for work and for attending to the essential details was critical to the completion of the enterprise, which has proved to be a considerable success in no small measure due to his efforts. He retired from the Trust in 1976 at the age of 70 as required by its by-laws. However, that did not end his devotion to the needs of systematic bacteriology. In collaboration with John G. Holt, who succeeded him as Editor for the Trust, he took on the task of producing an addendum for the *Index Bergeyana*, an archival compilation of names of bacteria and their authors, to be as complete as possible up to the new date from which, according to the 1976 revision of the Bacteriological Code, all priorities will date (1 January 1980). Despite opinions to the contrary, Norm Gibbons believed implicitly that former work should not be forgotten and that access to the earlier names and descriptions is needed, even if they are not on the approved list, as an aid to authors publishing new names under the new rules. He was engaged in this task at the time of his death.

He received many honors during his life, some

of which are mentioned above. He was also awarded the MBE and the Centennial Medal for his services to Canada. Most of all, people remember his good humor, his capacity for a simple and effective organization of affairs to accomplish good ends, his capacity for hard work, and his uncanny ability to bring order into complex problems and to arrive at a definitive solution of conclusion. He is remembered by all his associates with the deepest affection and respect.

He was at work to the very last, despite some rather restrictive health problems in recent years; he did not allow any anxieties to interrupt his intellectual exercises, his daily life, or his enjoyment of Sand Lake in the summertime. The January issue of the IJSB includes his last paper on taxonomic matters, and it is a testament to his breadth of view as well as to his belief in the purposes and needs for classification.

With all this life of activity, he was a devoted family man who shared both work and play with his family. In fact, much is owed to his wife, Alice, who survives him, not only because she accompanied him on most of the scientific social occasions, but also because her microbiological background allowed her to carry through and work on the many essential tasks that accompanied his energetic involvement in microbiology. She was a true contributor to his life in science, and together they made the best of a good life. Speaking for a host of friends and associates and for microbiology at large, I extend to her and to their two daughters, Janith (Mrs. Donald G. Ross) and Diana (Mrs. Terrence J. Grinnell) our heartfelt sympathy.

R. G. E. Murray

Chairman, Bergey's Manual Trust