

American Chestnut Cooperators' Foundation excerpt from the 2001 Newsletter

HALL OF FAME

In July, 2001, John Rush Elkins, was inducted into the West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame, recognized for his life-long dedication to American chestnut restoration. A founding member of the ACCF, John was active in American chestnut research, breeding, grafting and speaking out, long before our organization was chartered in 1984. Professor of Chemistry at Concord College, WV, his research focuses on studying the roll of the various tannins in chestnut bark as they may relate to blight resistance, with the goal of discovering chemical markers for blight resistance which would permit very early selections and speed up breeding progress.

American Chestnut Cooperators' Foundation excerpt from the 2002 Newsletter

FOUNDING FATHERS Since the majority of you are new members, let us introduce two deceased founding fathers, **Al Dietz** and **Bruce Given**, West Virginians whose dedication to American Chestnut restoration made possible the Lesesne project and our breeding program for blight resistance.

Al was an industrial chemist; Bruce worked for the West Virginia Division of Forestry. Well before the ACCF was founded, they were collecting American chestnuts, together and for separate projects.

Al took large quantities of American chestnut seed to be irradiated, with the hope of inducing mutations favorable to blight resistance. He made plantations of these seedlings in cooperation with landowners throughout the East. The Lesesne is his largest plantation; the Virginia Tech airport plot is among his smallest. Stronghold, Inc. in Maryland, a new 2002 ACCF member, is also a legacy of Al Dietz. We were able to test very few of his trees (all at the Virginia Tech airport, but just a small number at the Lesesne) for blight resistance and found only a few at the Lesesne with low levels of blight resistance.

Al also discovered the Gault chestnut in Ohio, a grandparent on both sides of our F2 cross, Miles x Ruth, with the best chance right now to breed true for blight resistance.

Bruce Given was most interested in finding American chestnuts with possible blight resistance and grafting them into Chinese chestnut stocks to make all-American chestnut breeding possible and to assemble an American chestnut collection at a West Virginia tree nursery. Because of his nursery collections, we can distribute American chestnut seedlings at cost to our members. Bruce spent years refining bark grafting techniques, especially for American chestnut replication; his work made our all-American chestnut breeding program possible.

Bruce grafted the blight-resistant chestnuts (1980) in the Lesesne, into the stocks of some of Al's trees which were blight-susceptible; he made the big chestnut grafts which have become the first demonstration within the natural range of a high level of chestnut blight control. Bruce taught John Elkins to graft chestnuts, and John taught me. We are fortunate to follow in their footsteps.

***American Chestnut Cooperators' Foundation excerpt from the
January 2021 Newsletter***

Our dear colleague and ACCF co-founder, Dr. John Rush Elkins, passed away last September. A great teacher and master grafter, John trained and inspired us in the field and completed seminal groundwork to the restoration of the species. **His contributions made possible the achievement of blight resistance 20 years earlier than predicted.** John's legacy is in every American chestnut sent out to our cooperators, a continuum of advancing intercrossed genetics of original pandemic survivors. We are lucky to be able to take our part in restoration of the tree species most critical to expanding the carrying capacity of our eastern forests. All of us together, fully engaged in pursuit of the calling, can return the American chestnut throughout its natural range.

Respectfully submitted,

Lucille Griffin, Executive Director

Dedicated to the restoration of American chestnuts

<https://accf-online.org>

<https://accf-chestnut.org>