

## A Tribute to Armen Charles Tarjan (1920-2009)



Charlie Tarjan, Professor Emeritus of the Entomology and Nematology Department, University of Florida, Gainesville, USA, passed away on January 25, 2009. Charlie was born December 10, 1920, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His parents were Armenian refugees who named their son Armen after their beloved and tragically vanquished country.

Charlie grew up in an Armenian community where he completed high school and was involved in many social activities. He joined the New Jersey National Guard May 1939 and enrolled at Rutgers University Sept. 1940 to pursue a degree in science. With the United States involvement in World War II Charlie joined was drafted into the Army. He attended Officer Training School where he was commissioned as a Message Center Officer. He volunteered for the infantry paratroopers and was shipped overseas to the Philippines. He soon moved to Japan where he served as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the 511<sup>th</sup> Airborne Signal Corps. He became Executive Officer in Okinawa and Company Commander in Hokkaido until he was discharged in 1946. He remained active in the US Army Reserves and was promoted to Captain, Medical Service Corps in 1955. He was released from Army Reserve Status in 1963.

Charlie met and fell in love with Mary Coury from West Virginia, an attractive lady whose Armenian parents managed a renowned bakery. They married in 1945, and shared over 63 years together. At the time of his marriage Charlie was on active military duty. Following his discharge from active duty he continued his studies at Rutgers University and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1947.

After graduation, Charlie had the opportunity to continue his studies in plant pathology with an emphasis in nematology. He was granted a fellowship from the Bartlett Tree Company. Since nematology in the United States was in its infancy, beginning students enrolled in the Division of Plant Pathology, University of Maryland, College Park, and conducted their research work at the Division of Nematology, Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Beltsville, Maryland. Charlie took this route and began his training in

Nematology under the direct supervision of Gotthold Steiner. Steiner was holding the position of director of the Bureau of Plant Industry after taking the position vacated by replacing N. A. Cobb in 1932. The graduate years provided Charlie with the great opportunity to work not only under the guidance of Steiner, a famous zoologist and nematologist, but also to receive additional training from other great scientists in nematology, such as Ben Chitwood who shared the lab with Charlie for several months. During his training, Charlie was granted the opportunity to work with several European nematologists, namely Hans Goffart, Michael Oostenbrink, and Ir. Van Den Brande who were visiting scientists at the USDA. Charlie shared his training with other graduate students who became well-known nematologists and spread nematological research and teaching to major academic research centers in the US and abroad. These students included Eldon Cairns (Alabama), Victor Dropkin (Maryland), Morgan Golden (Maryland), Luis Gonzaga Lordello (Brazil), Ben Lounsbury (California), Bakir Oteifa (Egypt), Harold Reynolds (Arizona), and Joe Sasser (North Carolina). Charlie's exposure to so many national and international students in nematology and also to nematologists from Europe and other countries promoted his passion for international studies and for cooperating with scientists outside the US. He completed his Master of Science degree in 1949 and immediately pursued a Ph.D degree, graduating in 1951.

His first employment was as an assistant nematologist with the Division of Nematology, USDA. He was soon hired by the University of Rhode Island as an assistant professor, serving from 1951 to 1955. In 1955, Charlie was hired away from URI to fill a research nematology position at the Citrus Experiment Station of the University of Florida in Lake Alfred, Florida. In spite of the fact that Charlie had received training mainly on taxonomy and morphology of plant parasitic and marine nematodes, he faced with enthusiasm the challenges of this new position, which required research on the management of a new citrus disease, spreading decline, caused by the burrowing nematode (*Radopholus similis*). Charlie dedicated more than 20 years to studying the biology, management and extraction techniques of the burrowing nematode. The appointment of John O'Bannon as ARS USDA research nematologist on citrus nematode diseases at the USDA Horticultural Research Laboratory in Orlando fostered a close working relationship that benefitted both scientists. They formed a close collaboration that lasted for several years. Their team-work, along with the contributions of nematologists in other Florida agencies, resulted in the preparation of guidelines that are still implemented by citrus growers to prevent the dissemination of the burrowing nematode and to keep infested orchards profitable. The work on citrus nematode diseases did not prevent Charlie from conducting taxonomical research, investigations on nematode pathogens of tropical crops, and studies on marine nematodes. Through research fellowships, he was involved in international projects in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Egypt, Germany, Panama, Portugal, and Puerto Rico. During sabbaticals, he stimulated and directed local nematologists in obtaining research funds and in conducting research on local nematode problems.

His transfer in 1978 from the Citrus Experiment Station in Lake Alfred to the Entomology and Nematology Department, University of Florida, Gainesville allowed him to dedicate more time to teaching and taxonomical studies. Charlie was an exceptional speaker with great charisma. He really enjoyed the campus life that provided the opportunity to work with students and colleagues. He had great communication skills, excellent diction and eloquence along with familiarity with several foreign languages. The Spanish language was his

favorite. This knowledge provided him recognition and appreciation as a speaker during nematological meetings and other encounters with nematologists from Latin America and other parts of the world.

He was considered by European nematologists “as a leading advocate for Internationalism in Nematology”. Following this idea, Charlie was a charter member and organizing committee member of the Society of Nematologists (SON), one of the founding fathers of the Organization of Nematologists of Tropical America (ONTA), and a founding member of the Florida Nematology Forum. Additionally, Charlie stimulated strong cooperation among Florida nematologists and their colleagues in Latin America. Charlie was among the first nematologists to suggest that the European Society of Nematologists (ESN), SON and ONTA should hold joint meetings to share their experience and knowledge. The first such meeting was held at Guelph, Canada, in 1984.

Charlie was also a strong and prolific writer credited by 204 research papers and four books, which include An Illustrated Guide to the Marine Nematodes, Check List of Plant and Soil Nematodes – A Nomenclatorial Compilation, Supplement (1961-1965) to the Check List of Plant and Soil Nematodes, and Nomenclatorial Complication of Plant and Soil Nematodes. All four are excellent references. He was recognized as a leading taxonomist. His great enthusiasm and extensive knowledge in nematology has proven to be an inspiration to all persons interested in studying nematodes. He was recipient of many honors including ONTA’s Distinguished Service Award, an Honorary Member of both ONTA and SON, and a Fellow of ESN (1986). The ESN was one of his cherished societies and he attended many meetings and always engaged in animated and passionate discussions and talks.

Charlie Tarjan was very receptive to new ideas and innovative tools such as computers that he mastered early on and used for teaching purposes. Charlie had many interests outside nematology. For example he established the Gainesville Astronomy Club, a Lacrosse Club, and a financial investment group. He played many musical instruments, such as the accordion, the classical guitar, the baritone horn, and the trombone. He performed on many occasions with the Gainesville Community Band and a jazz/swing band. He kept himself fit by playing sports and working out in fitness clubs. That fitness allowed him to recover quickly from three different hip replacements.

Charlie was an unselfish person with an outgoing personality and he was always very concerned about the welfare of students and young scientists whom he helped both financially and scientifically. Charlie is survived by his wife Mary, son Alan Charles Tarjan, daughter Susan Tarjan Donovan, and two grandchildren Maren K. Donovan and John R. Donovan. This tribute was prepared by Florida Nematologists who had the privilege of enjoying Charlie’s scientific knowledge and friendship for a very long time.