DR. HOMER L. SHANTZ
1876-1958

"Homer Leroy Shantz, plant physiologist, plant ecologist, and administrator of note. His contributions to the understanding of drought resistance in plants, to the ecology of grasslands, and to world-wide plant geography have been laudable achievements in botanical science."

A feature of the 50th anniversary of the Botanical Society of America was the awarding of the Golden Jubilee Certificates of Merit to fifty outstanding living botanists. The above citation from this occasion sums up in brief a life-time of work devoted to the biological sciences .

Homer Leroy Shantz, born on January 24, 1876 in Kent County, Michigan was the son of Abraham K. and Mary E. (Ankney) Shantz. On December 25, 1901 he married Lucia Moore Soper of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. From this marriage two sons were born, Homer L. Shantz, Jr., in 1903 and Benjamin S. Shantz in 1904. His early schooling was in Colorado where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1901 from Colorado College at Colorado Springs. After two years as an intsructor at Colorado College he transferred to the University of Nebraska where in 1905 he received his Doctor of Philosophy degree.

His early acquaintance with the semi-arid regions east of the Colorado Rockies led to his pioneering in soil moisture and the alkali tolerance of plants at the dry-land station at Akron, Colorado. During these years with the United States Department of Agriculture from 1908 to 1923 Dr. Shantz, with several collaborators, published some of the early work on soil moisture.

In 1919 he was appointed as a representative of the United States Department of Agriculture on a commission of technical advisors for the American Commission to Negotiate Peace to determine the plant resources and agricultural potentialities of Africa. As a member of this commission he made trips that covered most of Africa from Capetown to Cairo. During this time he also served on an African Educational Commission, organized through the cooperation of the British Colonial Office and the Phelps-Stokes Fund. In 1923 he published with C. F. Marbut "The Vegetation and Soils of Africa." This classic is the basic work on vegetation and soils of Africa and is still in demand. His earlier interest in Africa was followed, in 1955 and 1956, by another trip when the Office of Naval Research appointed Dr. Shantz to resurvey his earlier work in order to judge the progress of African Agriculture and vegetation during the years between 1919 and 1955.

During the years Dr. Shantz was with the United States Department of Agriculture he worked as collaborator with the United States Geological Survey on the classification of homestead lands on the basis of principal types of vegetation. This work culminated in 1923 with the publication of "The Vegetation of the United States" with Raphael Zon as co-author.

In 1926 he left the United States Department of Agriculture and accepted a position as Professor of Botany and Head of the Department of Botany at the University of Illinois. It was from this position that he was called to serve as President of the University of Arizona in 1928.

Dr. Shantz served as president of the University of Arizona from 1928 until 1936 when he resigned to accept a position as Chief of the Division of Wildlife Management of the Forest Service. As Chief of Wildlife Management he was responsible for many of the refinements in game management that put Wildlife control on a working basis. He retired from the Division of Wildlife Management in 1944 and he and his wife, Lucia, went to Santa Barbara, California to live.

Dr. Shantz received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from Colorado College in 1926 and an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Nebraska in 1955. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Society of Agronomy, and Royal Society of Arts (London); a corresponding member of the American Geographical Society, New York; a life-member of the American Society of Plant Physiologists, Cosmos Club, Explorers Club, and the Association of American Geographers; and a member of the Botanical Society of America, American Meteorological Society, Washington Botanical Society, Washington Academy of Science, International Society of Soil Science, International African Institute, American Microscopical Society, Ecological Society of America, Society for the International Protection of Nature, British Ecological Society, Association of American Geographers, and Wildlife Society. In 1950 Dr. Shantz received from the Association of American Geographers the outstanding award for contribution to Geography. Dr. Shantz was an honorary member of Societas pro Fauna et Flora Fennica, Phytogeographical Society of Sweden, and the Board of Directors of Friends of the Land. His honorary societies included Phi Kappa Phi (national president, 1935-39), Sigma Xi, Phi Beta Kappa, Theta Alpha Phi, Alpha Zeta, Phi Mu Alpha, and Blue Key.

From the time of his first publication in 1905 entitled "Notes on the North American Species of Branchinecta and their Habitats," to the time of his death in 1958 when he had two manuscripts in press Dr. Shantz had written over 200 papers and books. The actual list on file at the University of Arizona library lists 217 titles. These run the gamut from algae to mammals. The University of Arizona has established a special collection of his material at the University library. Most of his notes and all of his photographs will be stored there where they will be available to future students.

In 1957 he undertook to rephotograph early photographs of the northern Great Plains taken when he was located in Akron, Colorado, He had arranged for a series of three papers, one to be on vegetational changes in the northern Great Plains, the second one on the Great Basin area of Utah, and the third one on the Somoran Desert area of southern Arizona. He did not complete these due to his death in 1958.

Dr. Shantz was one of a rather brilliant group of young men who appeared about the beginning of this century and helped to make botany what it is today. He numbered as friends most of the famous botanists of the first half of this century. For years to come students of the vegetation of the Great Plains will have to consider his work as authoritative for the first half of this century. (Prepared by Walter S. Phillips)