

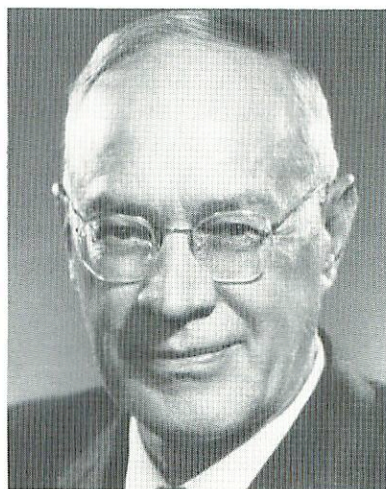
# I N M E M O R I A M

**Robert R. Coker**

**1905-1987**

Robert R. Coker, a man with a never-ending interest in agriculture died September 28, 1987. Much of this interest was from his father, and he often referred to the accomplishments of his father, the late David R. Coker, with great pride.

Of all the improved crop varieties (tobacco, cotton, corn, soybeans, oats, wheat, grain sorghum, etc.) produced by the company he directed, cotton was one of his favorites. He inherited from his father a consuming effort to control cotton insects and in particular, the boll weevil. His support of research to control this pest was almost as foremost as his desire and pride to produce premium cottons with the highest yield and the best fiber quality.



With the advent of the boll weevil in the early 20's, his father, David R. Coker, immediately initiated experiments to develop control methods for this insect. A few years ago, Dr. Coker gave me a copy of a bulletin written by his father on boll weevil control with a mop method using a mixture of sorghum molasses and calcium arsenate which was applied to the growing plant with a mop. I am certain this was the beginning of his unceasing interest in boll weevil eradication which led to a lifelong work and dedication to this accomplishment. During the 1950's and 1960's he spearheaded an effort to establish a federal boll weevil laboratory. His efforts to have this laboratory located in South Carolina failed because the strong supporter in Congress who obtained approval and funding selected the site at the Mississippi State University. Later, this same Congressman, on behalf of Dr. Coker, was responsible for the approval and funding of a bill to locate the USDA Coastal Plains Soil and Water Conservation Research Laboratory to serve the Coastal Plains of South Carolina and the Southeast, on Highway 52 near the Florence and Darlington County line. In 1969, he was appointed chairman of the Cotton Industries Special Committee on Boll Weevil Eradication and played a major role in organizing a pilot boll weevil eradication experiment which was concluded successfully in 1973. In December of that year, he personally presented a plan for boll weevil eradication developed under his leadership and presented it in special ceremonies to the Secretary of Agriculture in Washington, D. C. Later, Dr. Coker was named Chairman of a Committee on Boll Weevil Eradication established by the National Cotton Council to work with the USDA in implementing the eradication plan. This eradication plan has been successful in North and South Carolina and proposals are to extend the plan to other production areas.

Dr. Coker consistently maintained a true and genuine interest in the research and education programs at the Clemson Pee Dee Research and Education Center. He was present for groundbreaking, dedications and special programs. He supported vigorously all of the work at the Center and he was lavish in his praise. Naturally, his principal interest was in cotton insect research and Dr. Harrie M. Taft and I and other project leaders visited with him at regular intervals to apprise him of progress and obtain his most valuable counsel and support. Many of the basic procedures used in the boll weevil eradication program were researched at the Pee Dee Research and Education Center.

To fully appreciate the accomplishments and contributions of this man, in the agricultural arena, it would have been necessary to follow in his steps day after day and for years. He was held in the highest esteem and respect by all who knew him, not only in his company, his home town, county, state and nation but those from other countries as well. His personality and demeanor were such that sincere and lifelong friends were realized despite language barriers. Once on a trip to a remote cotton growing valley in Nazilli, Turkey where only Coker varieties were grown, he was received by the Director and co-workers at the Regional Cotton Research Center with such enthusiasm and respect that all work ceased for the day and a special tour of the Center and dinner given in his honor. I had never witnessed such an outpouring of admiration for someone who had been known only by the local performance and worldwide acceptance of Coker Cottons. After being introduced to the research and support personnel and responding with characteristic sincere and appreciative remarks, he was afforded treatment and respect reserved for visiting dignitaries. Under these circumstances, the real Robert Coker as a person was revealed - appreciative, pleased, attentive, courteous, responsive, charming and all the attributes of a southern gentleman. He left this experience with pride in Coker Cottons, in the many improved planting seeds of Cokers Pedigreed Seed Company and more determination to uphold and add to the legacy left in his hands.

Dr. Coker was a life member of the board of trustees of Clemson University, a former member of the S.C. Higher Education Commission, a member of Gamma Sigma Delta, an agricultural honor society, an honorary member of the South Carolina Entomological Society, and of the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity. Since 1974, he has been a trustee for Brookgreen Gardens.

Dr. Coker received the following awards and honors: S.C. Farm Bureau Certificate of Distinguished Service, 1959; Progressive Farmer Man of the Year in Service to S.C. Agriculture, 1964; Georgia Crop Improvement Association, Superior Service Award, 1971; S.C. Farmer Cooperative Council Distinguished Award, 1974; S.C. Association of County Agricultural Agents, Distinguished Service Award, 1977; honorary Agronomy Club president, Clemson Agronomy Club, 1980.

Responding to this request to present some information on the life and work of Robert R. Coker has proven to be an insurmountable task. His contributions were numerous in agriculture, business, and service to city, state and nation, but only agriculture was reviewed and this was reduced to cotton with only selected accomplishments cited. This can be characterized as an extremely small personal tribute to a truly great individual.

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