



## **RESOLUTION OF RESPECT**

**John Ernst Weaver**

**1884-1966**

The passing of Dr. John Ernst Weaver on June 8, 1966 marked an end to the long and distinguished career of America's foremost grassland ecologist. He devoted over half a century to teaching and research, most of it at his alma mater, the University of Nebraska.

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Courtesy of JSTOR.

Dr. Weaver was born in Villisca, Iowa on May 5, 1884. He received his B.Sc. degree from the University of Nebraska in 1909 and his M.S. in 1911. He studied at the University of Chicago in 1911, and received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1916 under the guidance of F. E. Clements. He taught botany at Washington State College from 1912 to 1914, where he made his pioneer studies on the palouse prairies, and at the University of Minnesota from 1914 to 1917. He moved to the University of Nebraska in 1917 as Professor of Botany where he remained for the rest of his career.

He accomplished a prodigious amount of research and was the author or co-author of 12 books and over 100 professional papers. His work was accomplished during the years when financial aid for research was difficult to come by, teaching loads were heavy, and the going was hard.

He is perhaps most noted for his pioneer studies on the prairies of central North America, particularly in eastern Nebraska and the surrounding area. He made intensive studies of original prairies before the drought of the 1930's, and recorded the subsequent changes of vegetation during and after the drought. This documentation is the type of work which will stand the test of time and serve as an invaluable source of basic information on our vanishing prairies for future investigators. As so aptly stated by R. T. Coupland, one of his former students, "The ultimate aim of grassland ecologists will be to attempt to simulate Weaver's work in the other five or six major units of the North American grassland, and in grasslands elsewhere."

Dr. Weaver's work on the ecology of roots will also stand as classic. He authored or co-authored six books and numerous papers on this subject, including studies on both the root systems of native plants and of field and vegetable crops. He was primarily interested in the study of vegetation as a pure science, but the basic information he provided on root relationships and the effects of grazing on grasslands serves as the foundation of many concepts and practices used in range management, crop ecology, and conservation in grassland areas today.

He co-authored a textbook, *Plant Ecology*, with F. E. Clements, the first edition appearing in 1928 and the second ten years later. It was translated into at least two foreign languages and used as a text in many parts of the world, and is still considered as an important reference. Four other books; *North American Prairie*, *Grasslands of the Great Plains* (co-authored by F. W. Albertson, with chapters contributed by B. W. Allred and Arnold Heerwagen), *The Vegetation of Nebraska*, and *Fifty Years of Research* summarize most of his life's work. The last two books were written after his retirement along with several research papers.

Dr. Weaver was also a truly exceptional teacher. His comprehensive knowledge of his field, devotion to his subject, and his unusual ability in communicating the written or spoken word were reflected in his enthusiastically presented and extremely interesting lectures, always documented by his own work or the work of others. He took just pride in the fact that none of his classes were required, but were always well attended by students majoring not only in botany, but in other disciplines as well. He expected hard work and nothing less than the very best from his students, and he gave of himself in like measure. He was a serious minded and sincere person, helping untold numbers of students not only in their

work with him, but also with their personal problems. He had little patience with unimportant activities or people who wasted his time, but he was always available for consultation with his graduate students or co-workers.

He directed the work of over fifty Ph.D. students from many parts of the United States and several foreign countries. His reputation helped make the University of Nebraska one of the leading centers for training students in plant ecology for nearly half a century. His former students occupy important positions in educational institutions and research organizations in the United States and other countries, attesting to the soundness of his tutelage.

Dr. Weaver was a leader in his profession, and received many honors. He was a past president of the Ecological Society of America in 1930, and the Nebraska Academy of Science in 1937. Also, he served as a member of the National Research Council Committee on Grasslands. He was a member of the Botanical Society of America, the Society of Soil and Water Conservation, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Society of Range Management, of which he was a charter member and recipient of the first Nebraska range management award. In addition, he belonged to Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Sigma, and was past president of the Nebraska Chapter of Sigma Xi.

He was selected as an honorary president of the International Botanical Congress held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1950, and was listed among the 100 "starred" botanists in *American Men of Science*. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Botanical Society of America held in 1956, he was awarded one of the society's fifty certificates of merit for his lifetime of research on the ecology of grasslands.

Rare indeed is a man who is both an outstanding research scientist and exceptional teacher. John Ernst Weaver was such a man.

Edward E. Dale, Jr.

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