

Dr. L. R. Waldron -



Devoted Wheat Researcher

Glenn S. Smith

The new hard red spring wheat variety "Waldron," recently released by the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, was named after Dr. L. R. Waldron because of the important contributions he made to wheat improvement in the spring wheat region. Dr. Waldron was wheat breeder at the University from 1916 to 1954, and produced five wheats named and released by the Experiment Station: Ceres, Komar, Rival, Vesta and Mida. In most years, from 1930 to 1955, "Waldron wheats" were the most widely grown hard red spring varieties, and their superiority added greatly to the wealth of the region.

Dr. Waldron was born in Ionia, Michigan in 1875. His older brother, Dr. C. B. Waldron, was one of the first NDAC staff members. "L. R." followed him to Fargo and earned his B.S. degree in 1899, one of two graduates in that year. From 1899 to 1905, he worked as instructor in botany under Dr. H. L. Bolley. He was interested in taxonomy, and contributed much to the identification and organization of the new NDAC herbarium. He earned his A.M. degree at the University of Michigan in 1902 and his Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1928.

In 1905 Waldron became the first superintendent of the newly established experiment station at Dickinson, North Dakota. There he determined the superior hardiness of Grimm alfalfa and creat-

ed the basis of an attractive tree and ornamental shrub planting which marks that station as one of the beauty spots of the state.

Following the severe wheat stem rust epidemic of 1916, Waldron was transferred to Fargo to become full-time wheat breeder, a position he held continuously until retiring in 1954. He died in 1954 shortly after retirement.

His earliest wheat variety was named Ceres. It was derived from a 1918 cross of Marquis x Kota and released in 1926. Ceres was earlier in maturity and more resistant to drouth and stem rust than Marquis, the most widely grown variety which it largely replaced in North Dakota. The trade had long been accustomed to the milling and baking characteristics of Marquis, and was slow to accept Ceres. However, Dr. C. E. Mangels, NDAC cereal chemist, showed that Ceres was equal to Marquis in most quality characteristics, and by 1934 Ceres occupied well over four million acres. A new race of stem rust, race 56, in 1935 devastated Ceres but it remained an important variety until about 1950.

Rival, released in 1939, was Dr. Waldron's next major new variety. It was well accepted because of its rust resistance and good yielding capacity, but was subject to black chaff and to shattering.

Dr. Waldron's most successful wheat was Mida, from a cross of Manitoba, Minnesota and North Dakota wheats, released in 1944. It was high in yield and strong in straw, as well as resistant to leaf and stem rust. In 1949, Mida occupied 5½ million acres, mostly in North and South Dakota. Rival still occupied nearly three million acres, and Ceres over one million acres. Even in 1954, Ceres, Rival and Mida occupied over 2½ million acres. So near the close of his career, Dr. Waldron's wheats still received wide acceptance, both on the farm and in the trade.

Dr. Waldron was a prolific writer, turning out 85 papers for scientific and technical publications. He wrote more than 100 articles for the Dakota Farmer. He was widely read on subjects ranging from the cultural to the philosophic. Long before some plant breeders had read the original papers, his field trials incorporated modern statistical designs.

The continuous devotion of this educated man to the problems of North Dakota for more than half a century has had a lasting impact on our state. Dr. Waldron's life and public contributions well illustrate the value of attracting and retaining the services of qualified people for a lifetime of service rather than allowing the best-qualified to move on to "greener pastures."

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