

OBITUARY

Malcolm R. Irwin

It is with deep regret that we record the death, on 9 October 1987, at the age of 90, of Professor Emeritus M.R. Irwin, honorary member of ISABR.

Professor Irwin was born in Mitchell, South Dakota, USA and raised on a farm in Iowa. He received bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees in genetics at Iowa State University. His PhD work was done under the guidance of Professor E.W. Lindstrom, a plant geneticist, and his post-doctoral studies were carried out at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, New York City. Here, inspired by people such as Heidelberger and Avery, the idea came to him that the techniques of immunology should be successful in detecting genetic characters. This concept was developed further when he moved to the University of Wisconsin in 1930, and indeed one of his first projects there was to immunize rabbits with maize pollen as the antigen. In the meantime, Professor L.J. Cole, then chairman of the Department of Genetics at Wisconsin, interested Irwin in the idea of making antibodies to cellular antigens of doves, pigeons and their hybrids. This study led to the development of the term 'Immunogenetics' and stimulated a surge of interest in this new area of scientific research; indeed, Irwin could justifiably be described as the 'father' of immunogenetics.

Irwin received many honours and awards during his long scientific career. He chaired the UW Madison Genetics Department from 1951 to 1965. His outstanding contribution to the field of interest of ISABR was that he was responsible for getting cattle and chicken blood typing studies under way. He had the foresight to suggest to L.C. Ferguson that they should try the same approach as that previously used by Todd & White (1910) in a search for cellular antigens of cattle. Irwin and his co-workers therefore laid the foundations of research that led ultimately to the establishment of our Society. It is not possible to list all of the early co-workers but familiar names such as L.C. Ferguson, C. Stormont, R.D. Owen, W.E. Briles and many others were at Wisconsin in those pioneering days. Further historical details may be found in Irwin's guest lecture given at the 14th ISABR Conference in Davis, California in 1974 and published in *Animal Blood Groups and Biochemical Genetics* **5**, 65-84 (1974).

Those of us who were privileged to meet Professor Irwin will remember him with affection and respect. Even in retirement he maintained an active and lively interest in all the new and exciting developments that were taking place in immunogenetics.

He leaves a widow, a son and daughter and four grandchildren.

E. M. TUCKER
President, ISABR