

Edward Lawrie Tatum  
1909 - 1975

Samson R. Gross

Edward L. Tatum died on November 5, 1975, after a long and painful illness which he had borne with fortitude for several years. To those of us who knew him well, Ed Tatum's death is an irreplaceable loss. His main scientific contributions, as all of you know, formed the basis for modern molecular genetics. He was justly honored at the highest levels for his roles in establishing gene-enzyme relationships in *Neurospora* and discovering recombination in *E. coli*. However, his quiet personality and his determination to remain a bench scientist kept him out of the limelight and in the laboratory. It is unfortunate that the younger generation of Neurosporologists thus never had the opportunity to know this man who laid the foundations upon which we are all building.

Ed's involvement at the frontiers of the new biology in the 1940's and 1950's was consistent with the scientific attitude that characterized his career, which was to concern himself only with those fundamental biological problems requiring some key observation or new methodology for eventual solution. Once having opened up the broad areas of biochemical genetics and bacterial genetics, he moved on to other problems -- leaving the fields he had opened for exploitation by others. For about a decade prior to his death, he devoted much of his time to the use of genetic technology in the study of morphogenesis. He was active in this work almost to the day of his death.

Ed's virtues went far beyond the laboratory. He was a kind person -- almost to a fault -- and remained calm and unflappable even under severe provocation. He assumed considerable administrative responsibility under very difficult circumstances, but chose to work hard and quietly in the background for the good of biologists as a whole, for which efforts he sometimes received scant thanks.

In keeping with his retiring attitude, Ed never attended the *Neurospora* Information Conferences and so most of you have never enjoyed the benefits of his lucid exposition and his clear insights into experimental strategy. He certainly felt that the virtues of *Neurospora* as an experimental organism had not been fully realized and would have encouraged us all to continue working as hard and as imaginatively as we could.