



**MARTHA ANN KOTILA ROANE**  
**1921 - 1996**

Martha K. Roane was born into a botanical heritage on November 1, 1921 at Munising, Michigan. Her father, John E. Kotila, was a potato pathologist for the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station and her mother, Martha Olsen, had grown up on a farm. Martha attended elementary school in East Lansing. About 1932, her father was appointed Plant Pathologist with the United States Department of Agriculture at Washington, DC so Martha attended high school in the District and graduated in 1939. Thereupon, she enrolled at Michigan State College to major in botany under the guidance of E. A. Bessey. Toward the end of her B.S. program in 1943, there was a need for women in the engineering aspects of the aircraft industry. She became a fellow in the Pratt and Whitney wartime training program and was thoroughly educated in mathematics and machinery. After graduation in 1944, she was assigned to work at Hartford where she devoted time to the development of jet engines and the translation of German patents related thereto. At war's end, she enrolled in the University of Minnesota Department of Plant Pathology where she worked on the late blight disease of potato under the direction of E. C. Stakman and C. J. Eide. Upon completion of her M. S. degree in 1946, she was awarded an assistantship at the University of Michigan to study under F. K. Sparrow, renowned aquatic mycologist. She resigned her assistantship to become Mrs. Curtis W. Roane in September 1947 and to move to Blacksburg, Virginia. There she worked for 14 months as a laboratory technician in the soil conservation section of the Agricultural Engineering Department at V.P.I.

Even as a technician, she published a paper on the recovery of platinum from potassium iodoplatinate.

From 1949 to 1956, Martha devoted herself exclusively to motherhood, but in 1956 she was offered employment as a part-time instructor in mathematics at V.P.I. In 1963, she was appointed Instructor in mathematics at Radford College for 1963-64 and Assistant Professor for 1964-68. Then fate evicted her from math and propelled her into botany. Radford College President Martin was prepared to promote her to Associate Professor and give her tenure when he discovered Martha had no degrees in math and by national accreditation standards was not qualified to teach college math. He had hired her upon the strength of recommendations from the V.P.I. Math Department and had not carefully examined her credentials. He duly assigned her to work as Assistant Director of Development for 1968-69 and allowed her leave time to renew her studies toward a Ph.D. in mycology at V.P.I. & S. U. There she was an advisee of R. A. Paterson who had been trained by Sparrow at Michigan. She was awarded her degree in 1971. She worked with O. K. Miller and Paterson as curator of fungal collections and taught biology laboratories during 1972-75. Fate again intervened when it was decided that three mycologists on the Biology Department faculty was one too many. Somehow, R. J. Stipes of the Department of Plant Pathology, Physiology and Weed Science, succeeded in having her appointed Adjunct Professor, and for several years she and Stipes contributed to the literature on the chestnut blight fungus and the genus *Endothia*. She was heavily involved as a cooperator with chestnut workers, especially Stipes and G. J. Griffin of V.P.I. & S.U., until a climax was reached with the publication of a monograph on chestnut blight. Meanwhile, an interest in the taxonomy of higher plants had been incubating and she published several papers on the Liliaceae, Poaceae and Ericaceae, especially *Rhododendron* species. She was co-editor with Bruce Parker of Volume IV, *Algae and Fungi* in the series *Distributional History of the Biota of the Southern Appalachians* and for several years was editor and a major contributor to *Jeffersonia*. With D. L. Coyier of Oregon State University, she organized and edited a *Compendium of Rhododendron Diseases* and with M. D. Cline of Monsanto Corp., St. Louis, she assembled a slide collection and prepared a text for *Diseases of Rhododendrons and Azaleas*; both of these were distributed by the American Phytopathological Society Press. Recently, she published in the *Virginia Journal of Science*, "The Grasses of Virginia," and with C. W. Roane, the "Fungal Diseases of Cereal Crops," and helped prepare manuscripts on fungi associated with Virginia grasses. If one were to examine a complete list of her publications, one would recognize that she would aptly be called a "botanist" having published in plant pathology, mycology, taxonomy of fungi and flowering plants, and having served as an editor of botanical publications. Martha did not limit her time to research and publications; she served on the Mycology Committee of APS, 1985-88, as a member of the Advisory Board of the Virginia Museum of Natural History, and on numerous committees of the Virginia Academy of Science. In the Botany Section of the Academy, she served as Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Chairman and Counselor. During eight years with the Flora Committee, she was Chairman, 1976-77, and Editor of *Jeffersonia* 1980-82. She served on several Academy committees: Local Arrangements, 1978-82; Chairman, Public Relations, 1978; Chairman Accommodations, 1982; Publications, 1982-84; Chairman Long Range Planning, 1983-86; Treasurer, 1982;

Secretary, 1982-83; Archives Committee, 1988-1996, Chairman, 1988-1992. She was honored to be nominated for President-elect in 1984. In 1991, she was named Fellow.

Martha did not limit her activities to science and professional societies. She served the community through the American Red Cross Bloodmobile Pack Table for over 15 years and was on the Montgomery County Board of the Red Cross more than five years; she was a Troop Leader and Board Member, and Secretary of the Virginia Skyline Girl Scout Council, 1974-76; she had received the Girl Scout Thanks Badge. In the Boy Scouts of America from 1977-1996, she held virtually every volunteer position imaginable, from Explorer Post Advisor (first woman in the district) to member of the Blue Ridge Mountains Council Executive Board (first woman), Wood Badge Staff Member (first woman) seven times, and member of the National Jamboree Staff, 1989. In 1991, she was tapped into the Order of the Arrow, and at the age of 70, like all initiates, she slept under the stars. The Council awarded her the Silver Beaver in 1986.

During the years she was Adjunct Professor at V.P.I. & S.U., she served for several years as Faculty Advisor and Chairman of the Advisory Committee of Alpha Phi Omega, a service Fraternity, and as Faculty Advisor to the V.P.I. & S.U. Student Services Council.

Martha had been honored by membership in Gamma Sigma Delta, Kappa Mu Epsilon, Pi Mu Epsilon, Sigma Xi, Phi Sigma, and Omicron Delta Kappa. One might look at the list of organizations and conclude she was just a joiner. Not so; when she joined, she took an active role in an organization and contributed ideas and guidance. She lived by the Boy Scout motto, laws, and oath.

Finally, you will note that she referred to herself as "c" of a committee. She disdained being called "chair", "chairperson" or "chairlady." She thought of the chairman as being either "Mr. Chairman" or "Madame Chairman", so to her chairman connoted being human as compared with "chairape," or "chairdonkey". "Madame Chairman" died December 31, 1996.