

Cyril Tenison White (1890–1950)

by **R. Sumner**

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Cyril Tenison White (1890–1950), botanist, was born on 17 August 1890 in Brisbane, son of Henry White, mercantile broker, and his wife Louisa, née Bailey, both Queensland born. Cyril was educated at South Brisbane State School before his appointment in 1905 as pupil-assistant to the colonial botanist of Queensland, a position which had been held by **F. M. Bailey**, his maternal grandfather. Combining simplicity and accurate detail, White's early work included the 976 line-drawings in Bailey's book, *A Comprehensive Catalogue of Queensland Plants* (1913), which was a new edition of his *Catalogue of the Indigenous Plants of Queensland* (1890). The 1913 publication also incorporated several colour plates of paintings by **M. E. Rowan**.

In 1917 White succeeded his uncle **J. F. Bailey** as Queensland's government botanist, a position he was to hold until his death. He collected species throughout Queensland, from other Australian States, and from New Guinea (1918) and New Caledonia (1923). Aided by international exchanges, he built up an important reference collection in the Queensland Herbarium. His insistence on full provenance data on all mounted specimens was a major step in modernizing the herbarium. On 21 October 1921 at South Brisbane he married with Baptist forms Henrietta Duncan Clark, an enthusiastic field naturalist and hiker.

As government botanist White helped pastoralists by identifying noxious weeds and by evaluating native pastures and fodder plants; he also assisted the timber industry. His books, *An Elementary Textbook of Australian Forest Botany* (1922) and *Principles of Botany for Queensland Farmers* (1938), became texts at the University of Queensland where he lectured in forest botany. His numerous publications included a 42-part series on weeds (1915–26) and a series on 41 Queensland trees (1921–27), both in the *Queensland Agricultural Journal*; with W. D. Francis he wrote for the *Queensland Naturalist* (1924–34) a 12-part illustrated series on eucalypts of the Brisbane district. An authority on tropical botany, White was chiefly interested in the taxonomy of woody plants. He maintained a close association with the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, United States of America, publishing a monograph on North Queensland rainforest species in its *Contributions* (1933). In 1939–40 he was Australian liaison officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London. He instructed forestry companies of the Australian Army in New Guinea in 1944 and conducted forestry surveys in the British Solomon Islands in 1945.

White relished bushwalking and camping, and led excursions of the Queensland Naturalists' Club. He served on its council and on that of the Royal Society of Queensland, and was active in several other horticultural and geographical societies. An energetic and convivial man who had a fund of anecdotes, he encouraged younger scientists and was affectionately known as 'C.T.'

Awarded the **Mueller** medal in 1946, he received an honorary M.Sc. in 1948 from the University of Queensland. Survived by his wife and two daughters, White died of heart disease at his home at Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, on 16 August 1950 and was cremated. In 1951 the Queensland Naturalists' Club instituted the annual C. T. White memorial lecture.

Select Bibliography

- *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, 62, no 3, 1950, p 35, and for list of publications
- *Queensland Naturalist*, 14, no 3, Jan 1951, p 42.

Related Entries in NCB Sites

- **Bailey, Frederick Manson** (cousin) 

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Citation details

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Cyril White, c.1925

Queensland State Archives, 1249427

Life Summary [details]

Birth

17 August, 1890
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Death

16 August, 1950 (aged 59)
Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Occupation or Descriptor

- botanist
- public servant