

Downs Is Summerfield Professor

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EVEN IN TODAY'S WORLD of female emancipation, a woman scientist is news and a distinguished one is a rarity. But it was no surprise to the world of science or her colleagues at the University of Kansas when Dr. Cora Downs was named Summerfield Distinguished Professor of Bacteriology.

The honor carries with it the income from a \$100,000 endowment, one of several such endowments through which private gifts help K.U. attract and keep outstanding faculty members.

The reputation of Cora Downs has spread far beyond the state in which she was born, reared, and educated—and the state which she has helped make famous in bacteriological circles. The New York Academy of Sciences, one of the oldest scientific societies in the United States, elected her a fellow in 1956, and the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. in Moscow has hung her photograph in its international gallery of medical honor

Close to Her Father's Microscope

Her interest in the microscopic goes back to the days of her childhood when her father, a physician in Kansas City, Kansas, showed her streptococci bacteria in his microscope. That must have been before she was nine years old. Her father, Dr. Henry M. Downs, died when she was nine. He was only 40.

Had he lived 10 years longer, Cora Downs might have become a physician herself. Lacking funds and facing the general belief that medicine was a man's job, she took the course next closest to her father's microscope: bacteriology.

The year—1912—she entered the University of Kansas, the virus responsible for tularemia was isolated in Tulare county, California. Five years after she earned her Ph.D. at K.U., "fame came hopping into her laboratory on the backs of some Kansas rabbits." That was the phrase used by the *Saturday Review* last year when its monthly "Science and Humanity" section devoted to Cora Downs its "Personality Portrait."

The stock market crash of 1929 had brought one Lawrence family, like others elsewhere in the nation, to shooting and eating rabbits to keep alive. They contracted tularemia.

No effective means of treating the disease was known. The man and his wife were sick for nine months. In the following years Dr. Down's sympathy, interest, and research helped to

explain the biological mechanism through which the virus brought about infection.

"Today," the *Saturday Review* article said, "her name stands alongside one or two at the top of the list of 'rabbit fever' research pioneers."

Through discoveries like these, through scientists who are kept in Kansas by the availability of research laboratories and capable students at the University of Kansas, this state not only is contributing to the welfare of the nation and of the world but is creating a new image of Kansas—a century ago on the frontiers of the nation, today on the frontiers of science.

Dr. Cora Downs is one of the pioneers.



BACTERIOLOGY

CORA M. DOWNS, '15, g'20, Ph.D.'24, is one of the world's most renowned bacteriologists. She has been a full professor at K.U. since 1935 and has traveled extensively, lecturing and doing research in many foreign countries. She has been responsible for vital work in tularemia, typhus, infectious mononucleosis and rickettsiae. She pioneered a fluorescent staining technique which enables identification of pathogens more quickly and positively than was ever before possible. Her work has saved many lives and has led to discoveries which would have been impossible without her effort.