

EDUARDO A. QUISUMBING
(1895-1986)

National Scientist

Born on November 24, 1895 in Sta. Cruz, Laguna, Dr. Eduardo A. Quisumbing pioneered in the field of botany in the country, and was especially recognized for his researches on Philippine orchids and other plants. His parents were Honorato Quisumbing, who was of Chinese and Spanish ancestry, and Ciriaca Arguelles, a Spanish mestiza. Despite his family's wealth – his parents owned land in Los Baños – he was taught the value of hard work and, thus, was never idle. As a boy, he was given the task of caring for the family's pigs, for which he would scrounge for roughage and waste food at the neighboring Camp Eldridge.

Quisumbing began studying at the College of Agriculture of the University of the Philippines in Los Baños in 1913. Not having any money for a calesa ride, he would hike all the way from the town proper to the campus, covering around six kilometers, not including his walk back home. Initially bent on taking up medicine and eventually becoming a doctor, he decided to shift to agriculture after attending a summer class in botany under Dean Edwin B. Copeland, the founder of the college. During the numerous excursions in the countryside through which Dean Copeland led the class, Quisumbing then a freshman, discovered the sheer joy of gathering different kinds of plants and studying these thereafter. Consequently, he enrolled in all the botany courses being taught at the time. He became the assistant of Copeland, who entrusted him with the supervision of the school's departure from the college. It was Copeland himself who introduced him to Dr. E.D. Merrill, the director of the Bureau of Science in Manila, to whom he would bring his collection of plants every weekend for the proper identification. Thus began what was to be a lifelong friendship and mutual cooperation between the two. Later, Dr. Merrill served as the dean of the college of agriculture of the University of California in Berkeley and as director of the New York Botanic Gardens and Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum. Eventually, Quisumbing would co-author with Merrill, as well as with Prof. Oakes Ames, several works on Philippine flora.

In 1918, Quisumbing obtained the degree of bachelor of science, major in agriculture from the UPCA. He acquired the degree of master of science in 1921 and his doctorate degree from the University of Chicago, *magna cum laude*, in 1923.

When he returned to the Philippines, he was initially designated instructor at the UPCA. He was subsequently promoted to the position of assistant professor. In 1926, through the efforts of Dr. Merrill, he became the first Filipino to be given a fellowship by the United States National Research Council, which allowed him to work as Merrill's research associate at the University of California in Berkeley, until 1928. It was during this period that he produced the work *Philippine Piperaceae*.

Before returning once again to his homeland, Dr. Quisumbing traveled to Europe to observe its outstanding herbaria, like those in Holland, Berlin, Paris, London and Geneva. Back in the Philippines, he accepted appointment as systematic botanist of the division of botany of the Bureau of Science. Later he was promoted to assistant division chief and, thereafter, chief. Subsequently, he was designated chief of the Natural History Museum, serving as such from 1940 to 1945 and then as the first director of the National Museum, 1947-1962. Aside from the University of the Philippines, he was also a professor of botany at the University of the East and the University of Santo Tomas, and served as head of the department of horticulture at Araneta University.

One of his major accomplishments as National Museum director was the construction and rehabilitation of the National Herbarium, whose huge collection of plant samples, ranging around 300,000, was totally destroyed during the Second World War. In spite of the seemingly insurmountable odds, such as lack of funds, he succeeded in the gargantuan task with his crew of plant collectors and Dr. Merrill, who assisted him in acquiring a replica of every known Philippine orchid, samples of which were given to various herbaria throughout the world. Thus, when he left

the government service in 1962, he had already replenished the herbarium with around 80,000 plant samples.

Like no other botanist before him, Dr. Quisumbing furnished Philippine taxonomy and botany with much invaluable basic knowledge. His studies on botany have yielded a wealth of information on the vast subject of Philippine plants. However, it was to orchidology that he devoted much of his research work, resulting mainly in the identification and classification of a huge number of Philippine orchids. His first work was entitled, *Studies on Philippine Bananas*, published in 1919. Subsequently, he produced studies on the anatomy and morphology of the coconut, weed seed, rubber and the Diospyros. In collaboration with Dr. Merrill, he produced works on Philippine plants covering 54 families and 119 species, to which he contributed 72 species.

In 1930, he began another collaboration, this time with Professor Ames of Harvard Herbarium, who had earlier come to the Philippines to study local orchids. Together, they produced a six-part work, "New or Noteworthy Philippine Orchids," for the *Philippine Journal of Science*, from 1931 to 1936. This series of articles mentioned "25 species of Philippine orchids, 12 varieties and one form." Unfortunately, this seminal work, was destroyed during Manila's liberation in 1945. In 1970, Quisumbing published another work which he had also co-authored with Ames. This was *Naming of Orchids*, which has since been used as a handy general reference by orchid aficionados.

In 1947, he co-founded the Philippine Orchid Society, and from 1947 to 1958, edited the *Philippine Orchid Review*, for which he also wrote articles on such topics as "orchid culture," "orchid propagation," "orchid companions," and the building of "orchid houses."

Throughout his career, Dr. Quisumbing attended numerous national and international conferences, such as the Fourth Far Eastern Prehistory Congress held in the Philippines in 1953, during which he served as the organizing chairman for the following categories: botany, plant geography, and museums, and the Eight International Congress of Botany of the International Union of Biological Sciences, which was convened in Paris, France in 1954. He served as chairman of the Philippine Committee to the International Council of Museum (ICOM), in 1947; the UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines, in 1950; and the Philippine Cultural Committee, which attended the Brussels Exposition in 1958.

Quisumbing acted as consultant to the Manila Civic Parks Committee in 1952 and, later, to the Commission of Wildlife and Parks. He was a member of the sub-committee on ethnobotany of the Pacific Science Association, the executive board of the Children's Museum and Library, the Board of National Education, the Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission, the National Science Board, and the Philippine Historical Commission. In 1957, he was appointed executive director of the Juan Luna Centennial Commission.

The sole acknowledged authority on Philippine orchids, Dr. Quisumbing was a member of various organizations, both here and abroad, including the Botanical Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Sigma Xi (University of Chicago chapter), the Orchid Circle of Ceylon, the American Orchid Society, the Orchid Society of New South Wales, the International Association for Plant Taxonomy, the Fil-American Association (which he served as secretary-treasurer in 1953), the Kapatiran Alagad ni Bonifacio, and the Quezon Society. He was president of the Philippine Science Society, the Philippine Association for the Advancement of Science (1954-1956), the Philippine Society of Plant Taxonomy (1958), the UP College of Agriculture Alumni Association, and the University of Chicago Alumni Association (Philippine Chapter). In 1953, he served as executive board member of the Philippine Society of Naturalists and the Philippine National Historical Society. In 1956, he was the grand commander of the Knights of Rizal.

In 1954, as part of the celebration of the Philippine National Science Week and, more importantly, in recognition of his signal accomplishments in the area of systematic botany, Dr.

Quisumbing was awarded the distinguished service medal and diploma of honor by then President Ramon Magsaysay. In the same year, he was named fellow of the American Philosophical Society. From July 1958 to September 1959, he was in Europe and the United States as recipient of the John Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship. He received the diploma of merit on orchidology and fellow gold medal from the Malaysian Orchid Society in 1966, the distinguished alumnus award from the UPCA in 1968, the most outstanding award from the Philippine Association for the Advancement of Science in 1975, and the distinguished service award from the Los Banos Orchid Society in 1980. In 1969, he became the first Asian to be awarded the gold medal by the American Orchid Society. On May 29, 1979, he was admitted into the National Academy of Science and Technology. A year later, he was named National Scientist for his outstanding contributions to plant taxonomy, systematics and morphology.

In his honor, various plants were named after him. These include the *Quisumbingiana Merrillii*, *Phopalodia quisumbingiana* (B.W. Skortzow); *Acasia Quisumbingii* (Merrill); *Saccolabium quisumbingii* (L.O. Williams); *Hopea Quisumbingiana* (Gutierrez); *Doritaenopsis Eduardo Quisumbing*, a bi-generic hybrid of orchid; and the *Phalaenopsis Eduardo Quisumbing*.

Dr. Quisumbing was married twice. He married his first wife, Basilisa Lim in 1919. He had four children, the eldest of whom, Honorato, died as an intern at the Philippine General Hospital during World War II.

He died on August 23, 1986 in Quezon City, at the age 90, leaving behind his second wife Trinidad Tanchoco and his three other children: Delicia, Lourdes, and Eduardo, Jr. He was buried at the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

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