

PROFESSOR ALINA SKIRGIEŁŁO

Alina Skirgiełło was born on November 3, 1911 in the village Klince in Russia. She spent her early childhood with her parents Jadwiga and Mieczysław Skirgiełło in Novozybkov. After her father, a lawyer, had got employed in forestry, the family moved to Posiołek Bor (Kostroma District) in the middle of forests of northern Russia.

The Skirgiełło family came to Poland after the World War I and stayed in Białowieża, where Alina attended primary school. A few years later they moved to Grodno. After finishing her college and getting a secondary school certificate in 1931 Alina Skirgiełło decided to study biology in the Warsaw University at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. She graduated and was granted her Master of Science degree in 1937. Her Master thesis, entitled “Polskie naziemne grzyby rurkowe” (Polish terrestrial tube fungi) on boletes and related genera, prepared under the supervision of Professor Bolesław Hryniewiecki, was published as a part of the “Planta Polonica” in 1939, just before the Second World War. Alina Skirgiełło started to work in the Department of Plant Systematics and Geography on the 1st January, 1939, as a researcher. During the war she still lived in Warsaw. She was working as a simple gardener in the Botanical Garden, was active in the resistance movement and cooperated with the Polish Home Army (AK). One of her great achievements was saving rare collections, herbaria and old books. She passed through dramatic events during the Warsaw Uprising in the summer 1944 when many of her colleagues, friends and relatives died, even the closest one – her brother Olgierd.

After the war, since 1945, Alina Skirgiełło has restarted her full time work in the Department of Plant Systematics and Geography and worked there till retiring in 1981. Among her main interests were taxonomical problems in *Boletaceae*, *Polyporaceae*, *Russula*, *Pluteus* and other fungi, as well as distribution of mushrooms in Poland and Europe. In 1948 she was granted doctor's degree for the thesis “Genus *Russula* in Poland and neighbouring countries”. In the following years she published over 180 scientific articles and books. The most valuable are monographs of *Boletales* and the genera *Russula*, *Lactarius*, *Volvariella* and *Pluteus*. All of them are fine illustrated by the author. They were published as parts of the series “Flora Polska – Grzyby” (Flora of Poland – Fungi), edited as a whole by Professor Skirgiełło. Apart from mycology she dealt also with paleobotany in co-operation with Hanna Czacott. She supervised at least 90 undergraduate and dozen graduate students. She provided opinions and reviews for numerous doctoral and habilitation theses, as well as in professor's title evaluation procedures.

Professor Alina Skirgiełło, fully engaged as a scientist and teacher, found time to do huge organisational work. She became a Head of the Department of Plant Systematics and Geography in 1960, then a Dean of the Faculty in the

years 1966-1975. For a couple of years she has been a Director of the Institute of Botany, Warsaw University. Also, she worked effectively for popularisation of mycology. She organised exhibitions, courses, wrote and translated many articles and books for amateurs. There is no doubt that the Mycological Section of the Polish Botanical Society, founded by her initiative in 1956, was one of her “beloved children”. Up to the present, for 50 years, she has been its President and soul. In 1965 she established *Acta Mycologica* – the first Polish mycological journal. Professor Skirgiełło was its Editor-in-Chief for 37 years; nowadays she is still its Honorary Editor. She received a host of awards and distinctions for her scientific and administrative achievements. She was honoured with several medals, e.g. of Bologna University (1981), University of Łódź (1989), University of Warsaw (2001), Władysław Szafer Scientific Medal and Polonia Restituta Knight’s Cross. Professor Skirgiełło has been conferred honorary membership of the Polish Botanical Society and the Committee of Botany (Polish Academy of Sciences).

On the 15th of September 2004, Professor Alina Skirgiełło became the first Honorary Member of the European Mycological Association. In the laudation it was written: “Professor Alina Skirgiełło is an exceptional Founder Member of the EMA. She is the only person to have attended every Congress of European Mycologists. Moreover, she has been not only a representative of Poland; but she also, for many years, played a key role as the contact person in co-operation between mycologists of western and eastern Europe. She always reported thoroughly the content of Congress sessions, shared Congress materials and information about the current trends in mycology with those mycologists who could not themselves attend congress for political or financial reasons. In September 1966 Professor Skirgiełło organised the IV CEM in Poland: 150 mycologists took part, half coming from the so called “socialist countries”, especially the Soviet Union. That Congress was a milestone in integration of European mycologists. All members of the EMA send her their congratulations and warm wishes”.

On the occasion of her 95. birthday the Editorial Council of *Acta Mycologica* proposed to devote a volume of this journal to its Founder – Professor Alina Skirgiełło. As a result of spontaneous reaction of mycologists, over 60 papers have been received. To satisfy all contributors it has been decided that the submitted papers will be published in two volumes – 41 and 42 – both of which should be treated as equivalent parts of the jubilee edition.

Our most sincere thanks are due to all the authors who sent their articles to be included in jubilee volume of *Acta Mycologica*.

We all would like to thank Professor Skirgiełło for everything she has done as mycologist, academic teacher and friend of us. We wish her all the best for next years!

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Łódź – Warszawa 2006