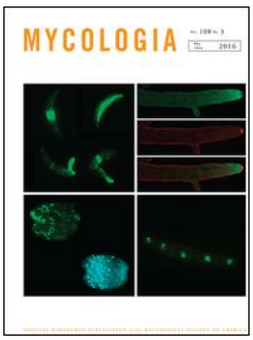

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Michael J. Larsen, 1938–2000

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Michael Larsen, long-time member of The Mycological Society of America, died at home in early Jun 2000. Born in Apr 1938 in London, England, to Ann Larsen and John Futter, Mike was raised as an only child by his mother and stepfather in Honeoye Falls, New York. He was active in sports and scouting, became an Eagle Scout and subsequently volunteered as a scoutmaster. In 1959 he won a gold medal at the Pan American Games rowing in the No. 4 position on Syracuse University's eight-man crew. Syracuse University awarded him a Bachelor of Science degree in botany in 1960. Mike entered the graduate program at the State University of New York's College of Forestry in Syracuse and studied the fungi causing decay of hardwood pulp bolts in New York State under Josiah L. Lowe. Awarded a Master of Science degree in 1963, Mike moved directly into the doctoral program at the college to study forest mycology under Robert L. Gilbertson. Thus began a 37 y association with the tomentelloid fungi (Basidiomycetes: Thelephoraceae). The resulting papers dealt primarily with alpha taxonomy and focused on the evaluation of species concepts, synonymy and taxonomically important morphological characters.

I first met Mike, his wife Barbara, their young family and dog Scratch in Sep 1964 when I joined the Department of Botany and Forest Pathology's graduate students in the ''attic'' of Marshall Hall. Mike, a lanky 6 foot 6, was anything but the stereotype of a graduate student bent over a microscope making thin sections of corticioid fungi. He was well advanced in his study of the systematics of the tomentelloid fungi, a group that essentially had been ignored 50 y in North America, but was having trouble reconciling the species concepts of his predecessors with his observations on the type specimens. At times muttering was heard from his cubicle and occasionally very strong language issued forth! These comments always were directed at mycologists. Mike never spoke harshly of the fungi. Although comparative studies using herbarium specimens were a major focus, he had tried various means of growing these fungi in culture. It perplexed him that they did not cooperate; we now know that, although they typically fruit on the lower surfaces of logs and fallen branches like many wood-rotting saprobes, they are mycorrhizal and require very specific conditions before they will grow in the laboratory.

Although the microscopic and laboratory studies were essential, it was in the field that Mike really came alive. He participated in the annual Peck Foray in early September and then forays across New York state. A favorite spot, as much for its affordability as for the varied habitats, was the Newcombe Forest in the Adirondack Mountains where Mike often stayed in a log cabin sans electricity and plumbing on Wolf Lake. Mike and his favorite minipeavey must have turned over most of the logs in the forest to accumulate collections that became the foundation of his thesis, and those fungi made the dark, slushy Syracuse winters bearable.

Mike was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1967. In 1966 the family had moved from Syracuse to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, where Mike had a position as mycologist with the Forest Insect and Disease Survey at the Canadian Forest Service's laboratory. The job had three principal aspects: to conduct research, identify specimens collected by the survey's rangers and manage the fungal herbarium. He and I spent a couple of enjoyable days collecting at Upper Island Lake, Searchmont and St Joseph's Island in early Oct 1970 then we lost contact for several years. Mike spent approximately 5 y in ''the Soo'' during which time he published a number of taxonomic and forest pathology papers and completed two manuals on *Tomentella* and allied species.

In Jan 1971 Mike joined John Palmer's Center for Forest Mycology Research at the Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin, to study the systematics of the polypores. Over the years Mike published on a wide variety of wood-inhabiting Hymenomycetes, (e.g., *Armillaria, Athelia, Bjerkandera, Botryobasidium, Byssoporia, Dentocorticium, Dendrocorticium, Fibroporia, Hyphodontia, Lazulinospora, Lindtneria, Meripilus, Phanerochaete, Piloderma* and *Postia*), but the fungi that were the main focus of his research were *Laeticorticium,* the tomentelloid genera, and *Phellinus.*

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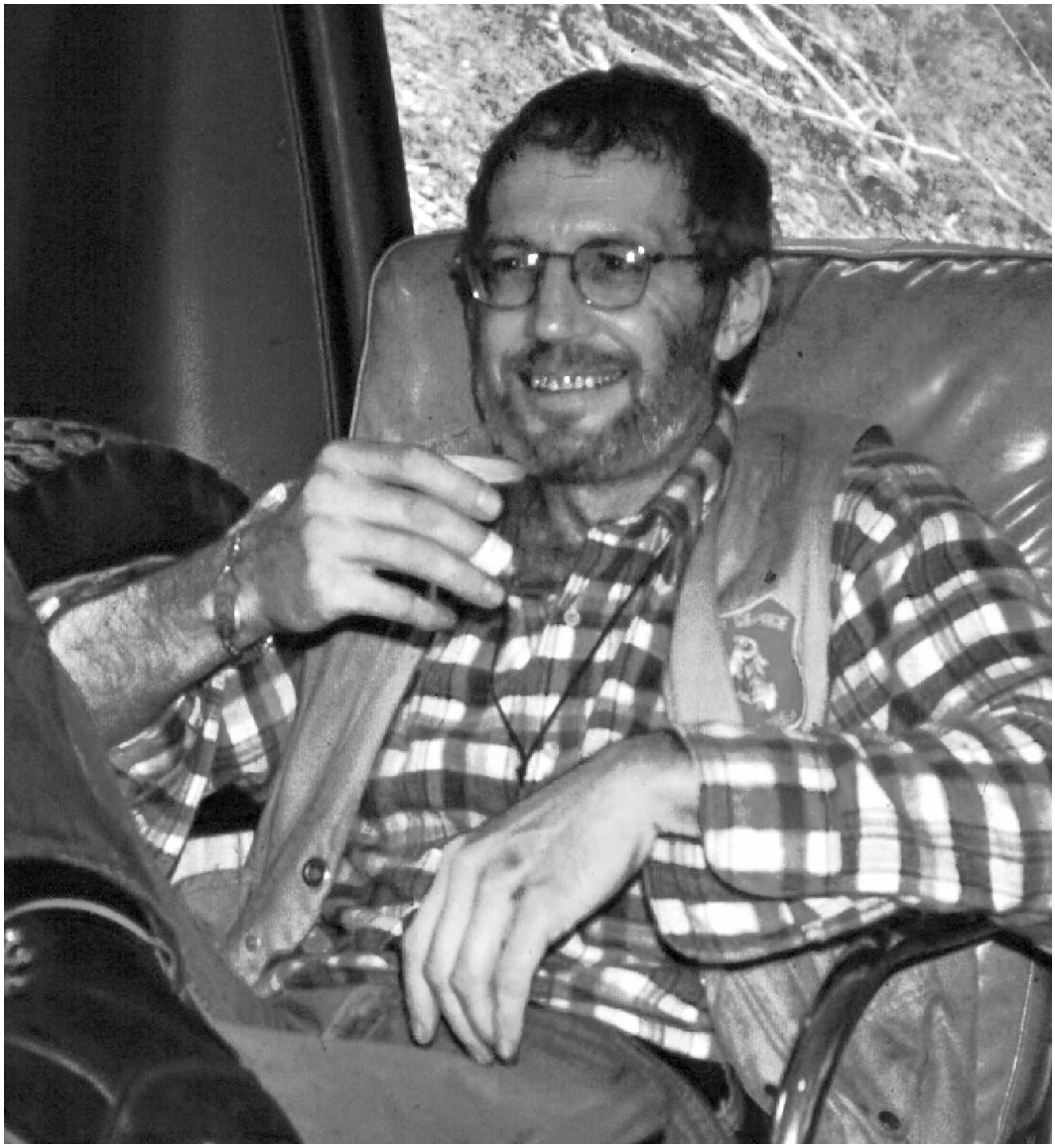

FIG. 1. Michael J. Larsen enjoying a glass of his favorite mountain spring water at Priest River Experimental Forest, Idaho. Photo by Alan Harvey, Jun 1982.

In the early 1970s Frances F. Lombard, a colleague in the forest mycology laboratory, and Mike began collaborating on the study of specific taxonomic problems in the genus *Phellinus*. They co-authored seven papers on the taxonomy of *Phellinus*. As so often happens in research, a small, focused study leads to a much enlarged, sometimes global project; this was the case with *Phellinus*. Not only was *Phellinus* a large genus of about 160 species plus 70 forms and varieties but the circumscription of many species was uncertain. The first step in a global treatment of *Phellinus* was to determine how many species names were involved. In 1990 Mike and Leslie Cobb-Pouille published a 206-page manual that included keys to species and a nomenclator of the names in *Phellinus*. Mike's nomenclatural study of *Phellinus* is a real landmark. It will be of use to anyone working on *Phellinus* in the future. In Madison Mike completed monographs of the genera *Pseudotomentella* and *Tomentellastrum,* and teamed with his former professor, R.L. Gilbertson, now at Tucson, Arizona, to produce a series of papers (1974–1978) on the taxonomy of *Laeticorticium,* the species that are the core of the genus *Corticium*. Intermittent studies in this group led in 1984 to two publications on laeticorticioid fungi, one with Karen K. Nakasone, also in the forest mycology laboratory.

Mike's inquiring mind led him to a couple of nontaxonomic tangents. He shifted interest to the northern Rocky Mountain forests in the early 1970s and

began a collaboration that was focused on soil microbiology, primarily with M.F. Jurgensen of Michigan Technological University at Houghton and Alan Harvey of the USFS's Forestry Sciences Laboratory at Missoula, Montana. The several dozen papers that they produced dealt with topics such as the ecology of ectomycorrhizae in managed stands, microbial activity after on-site residue removal, and nitrogen cycling in the forests. Traveling with Mike in the field Marty Jurgensen and Alan Harvey had a standing bet, so the story goes, that every time the crew went to an eatery with female waiters, Mike would be approached first. It never failed to be the case, even though all would conspire to seat him in the most inconvenient place. Needless to say he took a lot of ribbing about his attractive personality. Between 1989 and 1995 Mike teamed with Frederick Green of the Forest Products Laboratory in authoring, often with additional authors, 12 papers on the wood-decay processes, especially of brown rot, and on the presence of a hyphal sheath and its role in decay.

In 1995 Mike transferred from Madison to the USFS's Intermountain Research Station, Moscow, Idaho, to study, among other topics, the impact of wood-inhabiting fungi on ecosystem processes. The collaboration with Alan Harvey and Martyn Jurgensen that had been so productive during the previous 20 or so years continued until Mike's death. At different times, Mike had been an adjunct professor of forest mycology at Michigan Tech and affiliated professor of forest resources at the University of Idaho. For the last 6 or 7 y Mike's research centered around the contributions of decomposers to nutrient conditions and rooting habits for forest trees. In the background he was working on a monograph of the genus *Phellinus*. Unfortunately, neither the research efforts nor the monograph were completed.

Although he rarely attended meetings of any kind Mike was elected to the Mycological Society of America's governing council for 1978–1980. A colleague said that Mike hated rules and administration; he loved fieldwork, duck and pheasant hunting and dogs. He also loved discussing research philosophy and disliked meetings of all kinds (administrative and scientific) as much as he enjoyed one-on-one talks. A colleague from the Moscow laboratory wrote, ''His personal library and knowledge of the taxonomy of fungi were legendary. His contributions to mycology and forestry were both significant and extensive. His instinctive ability to unravel the intricacies of the genus *Phellinus* (and others) has been world class and his basic understanding of the place and functions of fungi in forest ecosystems admirable, especially with regard to the small details the rest of us were inclined to forget.''

Mike's family life was complex. He is survived by three parents, a sister and two brothers, three former wives, Barbara, Nancy and Marjorie, five children, three stepchildren and 11 grandchildren. His second wife Audrey died in 1978.

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