



The Alford American Family Association

Serving the Alford community over 25 Years
We Are Family!!

Robert Phillip Upchurch

AAFA #1418

February 9, 1928 - May 27, 2020



Email from the President of UAFA

This information and photo are a copy of the email received from the UAFA (Upchurch and Allied Families Association).

As President of Upchurch and Allied Families Association, Inc. it is my sad duty to report the passing of my friend and cousin Dr. Robert Phillip Upchurch, the founder of our Association. Phil died of pancreatic cancer at 8:30 AM Central Time on May 27, 2020 at his home in Missouri where he had lived since retirement in 1995 from the University of Arizona.

He is survived by his wife Sallaine after seventy-one years of a charmed marriage and by his three children Nelda Schuler, Debra Heck and Barry Upchurch. He was the dedicated Patriarch of a large family of 25 members that include eight grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Phil was born on February 9, 1928 in Wake County, NC in poverty but with loving parents. He was fortunate to become a fourteen-year-old student employee in an agricultural program at N.C. State University and adopted the professors as his surrogate family to emulate. He joined the program full-time in 1944 as a high school drop-out. Never having received a high school diploma, he nevertheless went on to earn B. S. and M. S. degrees in Agronomy at N. C. State and a PhD in Plant Physiology at the University of California-Davis. In 1953 he returned to N. C State University as an Assistant Professor where he rose to full Professor status by the time of his departure in 1965. During his time at N.C. State University he rapidly achieved an international reputation as a stellar performer in the field of Weed Science and in 1963 earned the award as the most outstanding young researcher at N. C. state University. He was commissioned as an officer in the United States Air Force in 1949 and retired in 1967 after serving 2 years active duty and 16 years in the reserves.

Phil continued as a research leader from 1965 to 1975 at Monsanto in St. Louis, MO a position he took to broaden his experience. From 1975 to 1995 he served as an administrator in the University of Arizona in several roles including head of the Plant Sciences Department, Director of Agricultural Development, Associate Dean for agricultural academic affairs and finally as Director of Arboretum Affairs. In Arizona Phil was widely recognized for his vision and dynamic leadership of programs and especially for his creation of the Desert Legume Program.

He established an extensive land program from 1985-2015 resulting in a 2,000-acre farming operation which brought him immense enjoyment.

Phil was recognized as a dynamic leader in five national professional societies. He founded the Plant Growth Regulation Society of America and served as president of that and two other organizations. He was widely sought as a consultant for the U. S. government, industry, and the National Academy of Sciences. For eight years he served as a plant sciences adviser to the President of Eli Lilly. He also headed an agricultural program for the U.S. State Department in Yemen.

Phil was intensely attracted to family history which he pursued aggressively for fifty years. For 37 years he published the Upchurch Bulletin in which he identified 62,000+ members of our American Upchurch family. In the process he assembled and organized in an elegant fashion a huge family history collection. By 2000, Phil was prepared to archive his paper Collection at the North Carolina State University and close shop. I convinced him to consider conversion of his work from paper to digital so his work could be duplicated and shared with the world via the Internet. After that, there was no stopping him. The vision of Upchurch and Allied Families Association (UAFA) was born and it was formally organized in 2013. Phil served as provider of background information, fundraiser, manager and guide. Thanks to thousands of hours of work by many others the fruits of Phil's fifty-year family history journey are now preserved in digital form and are available to all on our website, on UAFA sponsored Ancestry.com family trees and in YouTube videos. His work combined with others who have contributed their own extensive collections to UAFA is spectacularly displayed in an the Ancestry.com American Upchurch Family Tree that holds over 100 thousand related individuals. These online treasures are attracting attention in family history circles nationally and internationally and is inspiring volunteers and donors to provide ever increasing support.

Phil and I have become like brothers as we have engaged on our shared Upchurch heritage over the last thirty years. His vision and energies have enhanced my appreciation of my family history and I know that thousands have developed a similar appreciation for his exceptional dedication to the history of Upchurch and Allied Families. We can know that he will rest in peace having passed knowing that his deep engagement in our American story is being carried forward for generations to appreciate.

Respectfully submitted

D. Thomas Upchurch, M. D. Suwanee, Georgia
President, Upchurch and Allied Families Association.

PS: Final arrangements are being managed by Buchholz West Mortuary, 2211 Clarkson Rd, Chesterfield, Missouri. Services will be limited to 10 people because of isolation rules. The family has requested no flowers but encourage all who wish to memorialize Phil's many contributions to society to do so by a donation in his name to either: UAFA c/o Upchurch Realty, 173 Long Rd, Suite 108, Chesterfield, MO 63005 or Friends of the Library, NCSU Box 7111, Raleigh, NC 27265-7111. (both institutions are 501(c)3 non-profit)

AAFA Notes:

1. Although Phil Upchurch was not an Alford descendant, he and AAFA's founder Gil Alford corresponded about their two organizations. He also corresponded with John Smith regarding the Upchurch and Alford DNA matches.