

Nathan Edward (Ed) Tolbert was born May 19, 1919 on a farm outside Twin Falls, Idaho. His interest and love for plant biochemistry stemmed in great part from this background. His first two college years were spent at Idaho State University, but he completed his undergraduate degree in chemistry at the University of California-Berkeley. After graduation, Tolbert took a job as a research technician in the Enology Department at the University of California-Davis. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force in 1943 and became an officer. After World War II, Tolbert obtained his Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It was here where Tolbert developed an interest in photosynthesis. After a brief stint with the Atomic Energy Commission he decided to return to research at the Oak Ridge National Laboratories in Tennessee. In 1958, Tolbert joined MSU in the newly established Department of Biochemistry. Along with Willis Wood, Tolbert helped design the Biochemistry Building, completed in 1964. Scientifically, Tolbert focused on large issues including the air we breathe, food we eat, and CO₂ and O₂ production and balance. In 1984 he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences. He passed away on December 13, 1998.