

CHARLES MASON (1918-2012), CURATOR EMERITUS OF THE UNIVERSITY HERBARIUM REMEMBERED

We lost our colleague Charles Mason this last spring on March 7, 2012. He was one of the preeminent botanists of Arizona for more than 50 years and was honored with the Arizona Botanists Award in 2007. On that occasion some of his students and colleagues wrote short pieces on their association with Chuck. We here reprint those remembrances and a short biographical sketch as our way of paying tribute to our colleague and his career.

Charles Thomas Mason Jr. was born on 26 March, 1918, in Joliet, Illinois. After undergraduate work at the University of Chicago, Chuck headed west and became a product of the University of California's fine tradition of graduate education in botany. Chuck completed a Masters Degree at Berkeley in 1942 and a Ph.D. in 1949. Along the way he got married to his wonderful wife, Patricia, in 1943. His dissertation focused on biosystematics of the endemic North American angiosperm family, Limnanthaceae, and led to publications on embryo sac development in *Limnanthes* as well as a monograph of the genus. His major professor was Lincoln Constance, but his development as a botanist also was influenced heavily by the rest of his graduate committee, G. Ledyard Stebbins and Herbert L. Mason (his uncle). The curator of the UC Herbarium, Annetta Carter, taught him how to run an herbarium, which would serve Chuck in good stead throughout his career.

After completing his doctorate in 1949, Dr. Mason accepted an instructorship in botany at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. During his four years there, Chuck began his taxonomic studies of perennial North American gentians, which became a lasting research focus. He arrived at the University of Arizona in 1953 to begin a professorship in the Plant Sciences Department and to assume the curatorship of the University of Arizona Herbarium.

When Chuck arrived at the herbarium, things were in a state of disarray. Emphasis during the "Thornber era" had been on adding new specimens, but little had been done since to organize and curate the collections, and the herbarium was not particularly active in other ways. Chuck threw himself into a career-long endeavor to create a museum of regional and international importance for both its historical and newer accessions. He soon set out on his own botanical explorations in Arizona and Mexico and began publishing additions to the Arizona Flora by 1960. The herbarium became an integral part of arid lands research, range science, and plant science at the university and also became more heavily utilized by students and professors in what later became the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department. The herbarium developed a reputation among govern-



Chuck working in the ARIZ herbarium, probably in the 1960's.

ment agencies and other organizations for its public service plant identification program and for its other outreach, such as responding to queries from the Arizona Poison Control Center and various county extension agents. At the same time the herbarium continued to acquire important new collections, such as the herbaria of Thomas Kearney, Robert Peebles, Robert Hoshaw, and Howard Scott Gentry, and also developed a strong exchange program with other institutions around the world. Most importantly, the herbarium became a gathering place for a large and diverse group of loosely affiliated amateurs and professionals with broad interests in ethnobotany, horticulture, agriculture, ecology, climatology, conservation, taxonomy, and various other disciplines. This unique environment of interchange and academic ferment, so lacking in many other herbaria, has led to numerous lasting friendships and the development of many shared research projects over the years.

To his many former students, Chuck has been a supportive mentor and outstanding teacher. With his bow tie (later, a bola tie), dry wit, and engaging teaching style, Chuck won over many undergraduates into the field of botany. Among his graduate students who have gone on to careers in botany have been Barbara Phillips, Wesley Niles, Richard Halse, and George Yatskievych. In addition, Chuck has been active in several honor societies, including Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Phi, and Gamma Sigma Delta, and has contributed to the development of numerous young scholars through these groups.

During Chuck's association with the University of Arizona Herbarium of over 50 years the collection has grown from about 100,000 to nearly 300,000 vascular plant specimens.



Chuck and one of his students, Carole Jenkins, on a fieldtrip to the Cabeza Prieta in southwestern Arizona, March 1979.

REMEMBRANCES OF STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES

I found Dr. Mason to be a great advisor and mentor. I was new to graduate school and did not know exactly what to expect. He helped me enormously in adjusting to graduate school and in developing my thesis project. I was interested in doing a floristic study and he provided me with a great opportunity to do just that – a floristic study of Canyon de Chelly National Monument. I remember him as a great teacher. He was willing to meet with me at any time to answer questions and give advice. He was kind, considerate and helpful – basically an ideal mentor as far as I was concerned. I do recall that morning coffee breaks in the herbarium were well attended by graduate students and faculty. Donuts, and other goodies were often provided as well as companionship and interesting discussions on all the various topics of the day – including botanical ones. I was on several field trips with him and his knowledge of the Arizona Flora always amazed me. Especially being able to drive several miles an hour down a road and he was able to recognize all the plants in the ditches. The field trips were lots of fun and he has a great sense of humor. He certainly encouraged me to continue on with my studies in botany and without that I would not be a professional botanist today.

— *Richard R. Halse, Oregon State University*

I came to Arizona in 1986 to work as Curator of the Arizona State University Herbarium. I had heard a little about the new Vascular Plants of Arizona project and was very interested. I didn't quite feel like committing myself to the project completely, but was interested enough that I would attend organizational meetings. Finally Chuck announced that he believed that I should be a part of the Editorial Committee and then there was no way I could get out of it. The project, which has published many family treatments in the *Journal of the Arizona-Nevada Academy of Science* and now *Canotia*, continues on today. Largely a grass-roots effort, it has depended on the good will of the contributors and editors. Chuck has been a major force in pushing it forward.

— *Les Landrum, Arizona State University*

I have known Dr. Mason as a teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend for nearly 42 years. Through his leadership the University of Arizona Herbarium developed into a premier collection of Southwestern and Mexican plants, and through the incorporation of other important collections it became an invaluable historical reference for regional vegetation change. Over the years we have shared many memorable collecting trips from the Arizona Strip to southern Mexico. I'll never forget getting covered by Bursera sap while hacking down trees with a machete in Puebla for Pharmacy College research, or getting lost on the myriad of roads while plant collecting in the Grand Wash Cliffs area of northern Mohave County. Dr. Mason and Pat were always the most gracious of hosts in sharing their beautiful home with grad students. Dr. Mason is a legend in the history of Arizona botany, and he is richly deserving of the Outstanding Arizona Botanist award.

— *Art Phillips, Eckert, Colorado*

Let me set the stage – a new young graduate student comes in out of the bright Arizona sun, descends stairs to the basement of the Agricultural Sciences Building and goes through the double doors into a huge room filled with steel cases and clear glass pipes hanging from the ceiling. A slight man in a white shirt and bow tie greets me and offers a cup of coffee. People emerge from all parts of the room, gather ‘round, and suddenly the air is filled with plant collecting trip stories, exclamations of amazement, and questions about this plant or that (much in Latin!). What an exciting place to be a grad student! Day after day, year after year a room full of steel cabinets of dead plants and mothballs became the center of this grad student’s universe: for a few brief years only – but the warm memories of the camaraderie and friendships developed there last a lifetime. How wonderful the professor who created such a nurturing atmosphere – each student empowered individually to pursue her/his own goals and discover the fascinating hidden world of plants!

— *Barbara Goodrich Phillips, Zone Botanist, Coconino, Kaibab and Prescott National Forests*

I was first introduced to Chuck Mason in 1977, during my sophomore year at Arizona. At the time, I was not a model student, with a not-so-great GPA and a bad attitude about school. The turning point in my life was a change in advisors to Bob Hoshaw, who taught my first real botany course (plant morphology) and who responded to my newfound enthusiasm for plants by quickly introducing me to Dr. Mason. Soon I was collecting plants in southern Arizona on weekends and hanging around the herbarium at all hours, teaching myself how to identify my finds and sponging up tidbits of knowledge from the staff and visitors. The introductory plant taxonomy course that Chuck taught occupied me the following semester, and by then I was hooked.

During my junior year, Chuck sponsored my independent study project on ferns in part of the Huachuca Mountains, which led to my first botanical publication (in *Desert Plants*). By my senior year I was already working part time in the herbarium. Imagine, getting paid to do things like keying plants and poking around the collections! I was amazed. When it came time to graduate, I was still unsure about how to develop a career in botany, so Chuck wisely got me into the Master’s program in the Plant Sciences Department at the U of A. He further facilitated my transition into a plant taxonomist by offering me an assistantship in the herbarium throughout my studies. Weekly trips during spring semester to gather plant samples all around the area for the plant taxonomy labs became a highlight of my schedule.

When it became apparent that I would need to undertake extensive field work in Mexico to collect samples of my odd little study group, the parasitic Lennoaceae, Chuck not only helped me to gain funding, but also led a trip into remote portions of Baja California with me and then arranged for a colleague of his, Alan Beetle, to help me with field work farther south in Mexico. Although it would have been comfortable to continue on for a Ph.D. at the U of A, it was Chuck who advised me to continue to broaden my horizons, and it was he who sold his Master’s student to other taxonomists at the schools to which I applied. My move from Arizona to the Midwest for doctoral studies was a sad day in my

life, and the dark, quiet, underutilized herbarium at my next university only reinforced how special my experiences at the U of A herbarium had been.

Chuck was my co-author on some of my earliest papers in refereed journals and reviewed all of my early research before it was submitted. He knew that completing small projects unrelated to the thesis research was an important way to transform an upcoming student into a professional. I am pleased to have had the chance to continue collaborating with him very recently on a treatment of the family Crossosomataceae to be published in an upcoming volume of the Flora of North America series. Chuck's influence continues to be a part of my career more than 25 years after I left the desert for greener pastures in the Midwest.

— *George Yatskievych, Missouri Botanical Garden*