A SHORT HISTORY OF THE DAVIS HERBARIA

Editor's note: Ellen Dean, whose appointment was announced triumphantly in the last issue of LASTHENIA, arrived to take up her appointment as Director and Curator in July 1995. She reported on her initial months of learning and activity in the herbaria at the Fall Program Meeting. Her remarks, without the slides, are reprinted here for wider distribution.

Many of our members have visited the Davis Herbaria at one time or another to obtain assistance identifying plants. However, few users are familiar with the interesting history of the herbaria. Since my arrival in July, I have been learning about where the herbaria came from, digging into boxes of records, looking at pictures, and talking with the previous directors and curators, to whom I am grateful for providing much of the information in this article.

As most of you know, the Davis Herbaria are really several herbaria that once were housed separately. The majority of our specimens belong to either the J. M. Tucker Herbarium, which was originally the Botany Department Herbarium, or the Beecher Crampton Herbarium Collection, which was the Agronomy Department Herbarium. Both herbaria have long, distinguished histories at the University of California at Davis, which I will recount here.

The J. M. Tucker Herbarium

The University of California at Davis used to be known as the University of California Farm. The J. M. Tucker Herbarium began as the Botany Department Herbarium at the University Farm in 1922. In that year, Professor W. W. Robbins (the author of Weeds of California) founded the Botany Department, and he started the herbarium as a reference collection for himself and his students. Early collections by Robbins were mostly agricultural weeds, poisonous plants, and economic plants, often specimens that were sent to Robbins for identification.

June McCaskill at work in “nearly empty” herbarium in 1960.

Dr. Catherine Esau, the renowned plant anatomist, was hired in 1928 to teach several botany courses, among them Plant Taxonomy. As a result, the Botany Herbarium took up residence in Esau’s laboratory in the old Botany Building, which stood where the present Dramatic Arts building is now. Although the day-to-day curation of the specimens was taken up over the years by a series of assistants, Professor Esau made collections each spring while preparing for her plant taxonomy course. Accessions from this period were largely natives from the Sacramento Valley and adjacent coast ranges.

In 1946, Dr. Charles Heiser, the well-known expert on the Solanaceae (tomato family), joined the U.C. Davis faculty for one year. He was the first taxonomist to be in charge of the herbarium, and he left a surprising number of collections from his short tenure as Director.

Upon Heiser’s departure, John Tucker, then a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley, was hired to replace him. This began an era of increased activity for the Botany Herbarium, which by that time comprised 9400 specimens in 6 wooden cases. Dr. Tucker collected widely in California, but then, as now, he concentrated his efforts on the genus Quercus (oaks). Due to his research, the herbaria contain one of the best collections of oaks in the world.

By 1950, Dr. Tucker saw the need for more space for the collections and in that year, he moved them to Temporary Building 32, which was across from the Botany Building. The wooden cases lined one wall of a narrow tin-roofed room, and the occupants sweltered in the Davis summer heat. For the first few years, John Tucker was kept busy doing identifications and curating the herbarium without assistance. In time, it became apparent that he needed assistance, and in 1953, a young Mills College graduate, June McCaskill, was hired to assist him. June, of course, is well-known to all of you and well-loved by the botanical community in California. Dr. Tucker says that hiring June was one of the best decisions he ever made, and all of the people she has helped over the years would agree with that statement. June built a reputation over her 38 years of service as an ex-
pert on weeds and poisonous plants and was a co-author of the *Growers Weed Identification Handbook*. Her retirement in 1991 left a void in the herbarium that is difficult to fill.

Dr. Tucker initiated an exchange program, which is a way of trading extra specimens with other institutions, and in this way the Botany Herbarium grew and became world-wide in scope. By 1954 he had to purchase the first steel specimen cases, and in 1956 he obtained 50 cardboard Merrill boxes, which we still use, to store unmouted specimens. In the spring of 1960, the Botany Herbarium moved to its present location in 262 Robbins Hall, acquiring 61 new steel cases—enough, it was thought, to house the collections for the next 25 years.

By the early 1970s, however, the collections had already begun to outgrow their quarters. This was due, in part, to the hiring of a new taxonomist in 1966, Dr. Grady Webster. Due to his and his students' extensive collecting, Dr. Webster, a specialist in the Euphorbiaceae (the spurge family), dramatically increased the numbers of specimens coming into the herbarium. To solve the space problem, half-height cases were purchased for the herbarium, and these were placed on top of the full-height cases.

Upon Dr. Tucker's retirement in 1986, the Botany Department Herbarium was officially named the J. M. Tucker Herbarium, and Dr. Webster became its new director. He filled that role until my arrival, although he officially retired in 1993. After June's retirement in 1991, a graduate student, G. Fred Hrusa, curated the collections for four years and graciously remained after my arrival to "show me the ropes." Fred is a prolific collector himself, and he has donated several thousand specimens to the J. M. Tucker Herbarium.

The J. M. Tucker Herbarium has grown to about 140,000 mounted and unmouted specimens. Its collections are from all parts of the world, but they are mainly from California (especially the Central Valley, the Sierras, and the Sonoran and Mohave Deserts), other parts of the United States, Mediterranean Europe, Mexico, and Ecuador.

The Beecher Crampton Herbarium Collection

The second largest collection in the Davis Herbaria is the Beecher Crampton Herbarium Collection. That collection had its origins on the Berkeley Campus, where it was started in 1913 by Patrick B. Kennedy of the Agronomy Department. Dr. Kennedy was a teacher of range science, and a specialist in the genus *Trifolium* (clover). He founded the Agronomy Herbarium as a teaching collection, with special attention to developing a collection of grasses. The herbarium was most likely housed in Hilgard Hall, and according to Professor Crampton, Kennedy had a garden of experimental plots on the slope to the west of the building, from which he collected some of his specimens. Many of Kennedy’s collections (but not all) can be found in the Crampton Collection.

About 1926, Kennedy moved the collection to the then University Farm at Davis. It was housed in the old Agronomy Building, which was on the site of the present Everson Hall. After Kennedy's death in 1930, the collection was curated for a time by Ben Madison, Chair of the Agronomy Division, until Alan A. Beetle was hired to be the curator in 1941. Dr. Beetle, an agrostologist, remained at Davis for 5 years, contributing many specimens to the herbarium and leaving three type specimens in the collection. He left in 1946 for the University of Wyoming, and the herbarium was then curated until 1952 by a technician, Robert Tofsrud.
Beecher Crampton, who was hired to replace Tofslrud, came to Davis from the University of California at Berkeley. Over the years, he taught range plant courses, building up the grass collection to the finest in the state, and in 1974 he published a much used guide to California grasses, *Grasses in California*. Due to Professor Crampton's interest in collecting from vernal pools, the herbarium has a good representation of vernal pool plants, many of which are now endangered. The collection was moved in the 1950s to the new Agronomy Building, Hunt Hall, where it was located in room 235. Professor Crampton retired in 1984, leaving the collection without a curator until 1988, when it was moved to Robbins Hall and was officially named the Beecher Crampton Herbarium Collection. Only eight of the cases of the Crampton Collection fit inside 262 Robbins; most of the cases line the corridor outside the door, and many of the duplicate collections are in Merrill boxes. A number of cases still remain in Hunt Hall as a reference collection for range science majors. At this writing, the Crampton Collection comprises about 50,000 mounted and unmounted specimens.

**Recent Changes in the Herbaria:**

Since I arrived in July, we've made a few changes. In September, we obtained 10 new full-height cases, and 6 half-height cases. We inserted these cases at one end of the collection, displacing the remains of the old library area, a process that was begun in 1988 with the arrival of the Crampton Collection. Inserting the cases required moving the many Merrill boxes that are kept in this part of the herbaria, thus we were able to reorganize the boxes and take stock of what we have.

We moved the displaced library shelves into room 266, Dr. Tucker's old office, and that room will now be used for library overflow. Kate Mawdsley, the past president of the D.H.S., has undertaken the Herculean task of cataloging our library books, so that we can rearrange them by call number. Thanks, Kate!

Room 266 will also be used as our new computer facility. We have already moved our typewriter and record-keeping operations into that room. With the addition of a Pentium PC, a laser printer, and a Power Macintosh, we will begin efforts to computerize our record-keeping.

Ellen Dean surrounded by packed cases and overflow boxes in the herbarium, Summer 1995. (photo: Marcus Pfizner)

In general, we have been trying to clear away some of the clutter. The mounters' area has been neated up, and we have exposed more of the "great counter". An Olympus microscope will arrive shortly, providing a third station for examining specimens. One of the reasons we were able to clear the counter is that the Herbaria has been given an additional room, 268, which is next to room 266. We are using that area for shipping and storage. The additional space has really helped us out.

However, we are still pressed for space, and we will continue to struggle until we have the space that we need to accommodate the present and future collections in steel cases. One of my main challenges over the coming year will be to secure funding and space for the Herbaria, and we will keep you posted as new developments arise.

We are in somewhat better shape in terms of personnel. Jean Shepard, our new half-time Assistant Museum Scientist, just came on board in mid-November (welcome, Jean!). We have two part-time mounters, but we always need more mounters to help reduce the tremendous backlog of unmounted specimens, and we need to find volunteers to help us with that task. There are many interesting curatorial projects that need to be attended to. Perhaps one day with endowment money from the Davis Herbaria Society, we will be able to fund an herbarium fellowship to support a graduate student assistant to attend to some of those projects. In the mean time, we hope that members of Davis Herbaria Society will come by to see the changes that are occurring in 262 Robbins, and interested volunteers are always welcome!

*Source: Ellen A. Dean*

---

**Confessions of a Taxon “RevNot” editor**

**Editor's note:** Many of you will be glad to know that—despite the demise of the Botany Department—there is still a plaque on the wall outside the Chair's office with a list of undergraduates honored by the Departmental Citation in Botany. The very first name on that list, for 1963-64, is Rudolph Schmid, who has gone on to be Professor at the Berkeley campus and a leading plant morphologist, as well as a bibliophile (which the following article makes plain).

Back in spring 1993 Grady Webster asked me to write about my involvement with the "Reviews and notices of publications" [RevNot] column of the quarterly journal *Taxon: Journal of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy*. Well, the elusive, reclusive, and hopelessly procrastinating Rudi Schmid finally consented to interview himself, and so here goes:

IN (Interviewer): When did your involvement with *Taxon* start, and what is some of the history of the column?

RS (Rudi Schmid): *Taxon* is now in its 44th volume (1995). The column was called “New taxonomic literature” in vol. 1 (1951). Frans Stafleu spent 36 years editing *Taxon* and the RevNot column and with it was variously assisted by J. Lannouj, K. U. Kramer, R. S. Cowan, and myself. In the early 1980s I was sending notices and occasional reviews to Dick Cowan. When Dick retired to Australia, the editorship in Feb. 1986 changed from Cowan and Stafleu to Schmid and Stafleu. I became sole editor in February, 1988 with vol. 37. Before my time and for the first three columns in 1986 notices and reviews were sent to the printer with each entry starting a new sheet of paper; everything was manually typeset. I started computerizing with the November, 1986 column. The most unpleasant involvement with the column always was reading printer's proof, a hopelessly