

Obituary

DR. JOHN MERVIN HERR, JR. 1930–2016

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The Editorial Board of *Acta Biologica Cracoviensia Series Botanica* is grieved to report the death of Dr. John Mervin Herr, Jr. He passed away Sunday, June 19, 2016, at Bedford Memorial Hospital in Bedford, Virginia, in his 85th year.

Doctor Herr was a member of the Editorial Board of the journal from 1998 to the very end, providing the benefit of his great experience to the editorial staff. When invited to join the Editorial Board he replied that it would be a great honor to participate in the editorial work of a journal he had known for a long time. He was an excellent reviewer and he also voluntarily helped to correct the English of researchers' manuscripts for journals other than *ABCBotanica*. Dr. Herr published original and review articles in *ABCBotanica* and participated in the IX International Conference of Plant Embryologists held in Krakow in 1999, Poland, as an invited lecturer and chair of the session. In 2013, asked to evaluate the journal, he gave this assessment: *The greatest importance and foremost value of this journal is its coverage of botanical fields that have been increasingly neglected in some botanical journals and its broad appeal to botanical investigators throughout the entire world. Until the present editorial administration the journal was strongly inclined toward research activity in Eastern Europe. This recent, broader appeal is a unique feature for this journal...*

Dr. John Mervin Herr, a native of Charlottesville, Virginia, was an outstanding scientist, an expert in plant embryology, anatomy and developmental biology, and especially in the evolutionary origin of seeds and leaves. He developed a number of useful microtechniques, the most important and valuable being a clearing-fluid technique now applied worldwide.

Dr. Herr graduated from the University of Virginia with a master's degree (1951), and then from the University of North Carolina with a Ph.D. in Botany (1957). He served a post-doctoral appointment at the University of Delhi, India, on a Fulbright Fellowship (1957–58). He held positions at Washington and Lee University (Lexington, Virginia); Pfeiffer College (Misenheimer, North Carolina) and the University of South Carolina (Columbia, South Carolina) until retirement. At the University of South Carolina he served on many committees, wrote guidelines for organizing the University Faculty Senate, chaired the Faculty Senate, and chaired the Endowment Committee for the A. C. Moore Herbarium and Garden.

He was a mentor of graduate students and junior faculty alike, taught courses in plant anatomy, morphology and embryology, led workshops and seminars all over the world, and supervised numerous dissertations. For students *he was much more than a teacher, and he became a trusted advisor, a confidante, and a beloved friend* (from the obituary by John Nelson, his student in 1971).

From 1993 he was Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Department of Biology at the University of South Carolina, and was active to the very end. After retiring, for 23 years he contributed his wisdom and knowledge to the University students and researchers. In one of the last letters he sent me in April 2016 he wrote: *I retired 23 years ago, and I highly recommend working at the university with no cost to the institution. I have worked one on one with several graduate students and with one undergraduate honors student. I have since retirement raised almost \$300,000 for an endowment Lucrecia [his wife] and I started for the Herbarium. Endowments are better than*

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grants because the principle keeps earning money every year that has been sufficient to buy all the supplies for the herbarium, gasoline for collecting trips, and salary for student workers. I hope to advance this endowment to half a million dollars before I must leave the planet. His last new invention (March 2016) was a faster system for cutting fresh plant tissues for microscopic slides – a hydro-microtome – of which he was very proud.

He was a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London (1988) and President of the Association of Southeastern Biologists, the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, the Appalachian Regional Microscopy Society and the Thomas Cooper Society. His parliamentary skills enabled him to restructure the Constitution and Bylaws of the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, the Association of Southeastern Biologists and the Society of Herbarium Curators.

For his excellent achievements, several associations and societies bestowed awards on him, including the Elizabeth Ann Bartholomew Lifetime Service Award (1996) (Southern Appalachian Botanical Society), the Meritorious Teaching Award (1989), Lifetime Service Award (1996), Senior Research Award (1998) and the inaugural John Herr Lifetime Achievement Award (2007).

Dr. John Mervin Herr, Jr. was truly a gentleman and a Renaissance man. In 2005 he offered an unusual and unique gift to the university – a new melody for Carolina's alma mater, "We Hail Thee, Carolina", which had been sung to the tune of "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton". He felt that the poem written by George Wauchope in 1911 and adopted by the University in 1912 should have its own tune, so he sketched out a simple melody. In 2009 the new arrangement was performed by the University of South Carolina Concert Choir.

Dr. Herr and his wife Lucrecia were great-hearted donors. They contributed funds to the School of Music of USC which enabled the establishment of the annual John and Lucrecia Herr Composition Award for music students. They established the Thomas Cooper Library Science and Mathematics Endowment to support the increasing costs of journals in science and mathematics, to help provide needed journals for future generations of students. He was a good friend to all who knew him. I am personally grateful for John's and Lucrecia's special gift of love in memory of my mother Jadwiga Kuta, made in 2008 to the Crossnore School and Children's Home, a place of hope and healing for children in need in North Carolina.

His life was long, happy, and full of gifts and thoughts for people. He passed away peacefully after a walk at the Peaks of Otter off the Blue Ridge Parkway he loved, touching the hand of his wife Lucrecia: a beautiful ending to a noble life.

Doctor Herr's devotion to the practice of science won him the regard and admiration of all who knew him. It is a great loss of a person whose work and personality contributed so much to science. He will be sorely missed.

My feelings echo those of John Nelson's in his obituary of John Herr: *He always had a friendly greeting for those around him, and he was one of the most gentle, kindest people on our campus. John Herr was truly a gift to all of us, and we can all hope to be more like he was.*

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- HERR J, JR. 1995. The origin of the ovule. *American Journal of Botany* 82(4): 547–564 (Invited Special Paper).
- HERR J, JR. 1999. Endosperm development in *Arabidopsis thaliana* (L.) Heynh. *Acta Biologica Cracoviensia Series Botanica* 41: 103–109.
- HERR J, JR. 1999. On the origin of leaves: The telome theory revised. *Phytomorphology* 49(2): 111–134.
- HERR J, JR. 2000. On the origin of the ovule: Some key events and their impact. *Acta Biologica Cracoviensia Series Botanica* 42(2): 21–30.
- ANANDALAKSHMA R, MARATHE R, GE X, HERR J JR, MAU C, MAL-LORY A, PRUSS G, BOWMAN L, AND VANCE V. 2000. A calmodulin-related protein that suppresses posttranscriptional gene silencing in plants. *Science* 290: 142–145.
- HERR J, JR. 2000. Clearing Techniques for unusual studies in seed plant embryology. *Botanical Guidebooks* 24: 25–39.
- HERR J, JR. 2001. Basal stem tumours of transgenic tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum* L. and *N. benthamiana* Domin) and certain galls and burls: Causes and anatomical features in common. *Phytomorphology Golden Jubilee Issue*: 167–179.
- HERR J, JR. 2010. Investigations of structural and developmental variation in Angiosperms: The art and science of focused effort (Invited Paper). *Southeastern Biology* 57(1): 58–81.
- BALOGH E, HERR JM JR, CZAKÓ M, MÁRTON M. 2012. Defective development of male and female gametophytes in *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae). *Biomass and Bioenergy* 46: 265–269.

Websites used in preparing this obituary:

<http://www.biol.sc.edu/emeritus/herr>

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/thestate/obituary.aspx?pid=180492332>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGulQkJj524>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcdXRIsxysU>

<http://library.sc.edu/develop/tcsmje.html>

<http://www.biol.sc.edu/obituary-john-m-herr-jr>

http://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2016/05/another_way_to_hail_carolina.php#.WOAZ2mBdbIU



Nichts ist wertvoller als dieser tag.
— Johann Wolfgang Goethe

Fig. 1. Portrait of John Herr with a quote from a poem by Goethe, which he translated as “Nothing is worth more than this day,” followed by his note: “The statement has some special significance to me as I grow older” (from archive of E. Kuta).



Fig. 2. John Herr in his laboratory (from archive of E. Kuta).



Fig. 3. Farewell party of the International Conference on Plant Embryology in Modlnica Manor (1999).
From left: Elżbieta Kuta, Lucrecia Herr, John Herr, Lesław Przywara, Mauro Cresti (from archive of E. Kuta).



Fig. 4. John and Lucrecia Herr (from archive of E. Kuta).

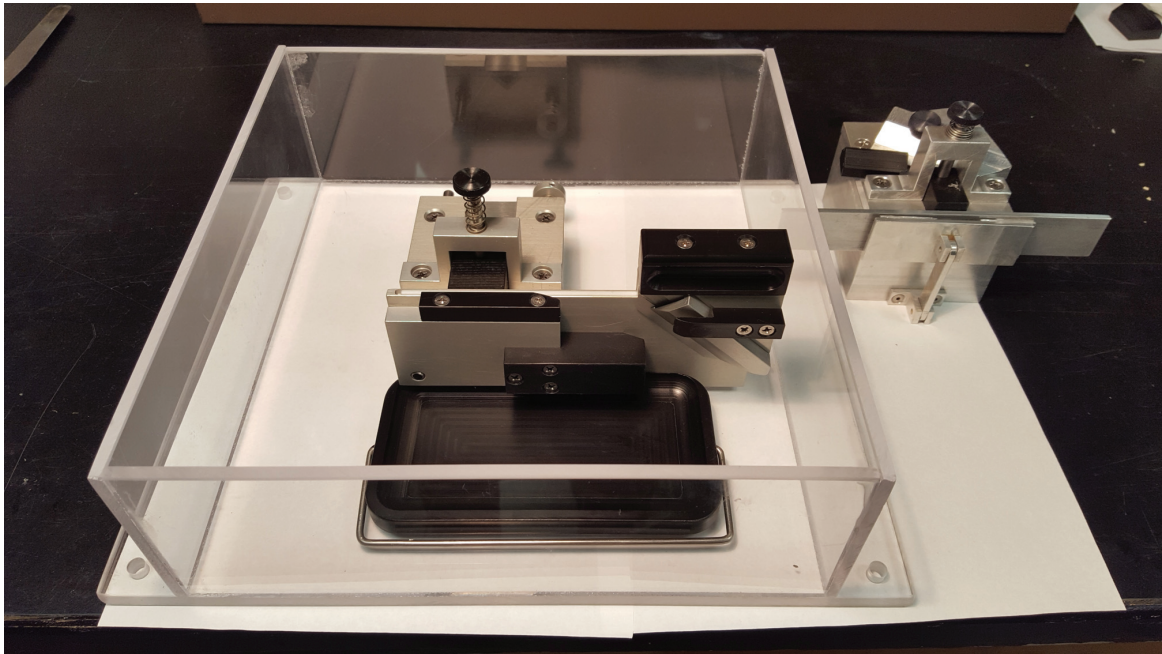


Fig. 5. Hydro-microtome, a new instrument for sectioning fresh plant organs, invented by Dr. John Herr (from archive of E. Kuta).

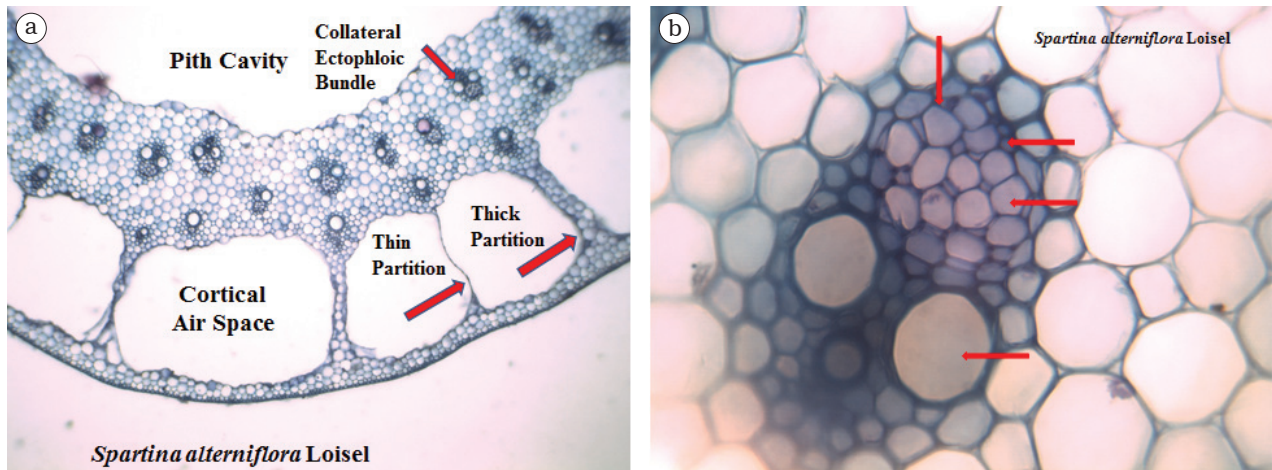


Fig. 6. Transversal sections of *Spartina artelniflora* Loisel stem (a) and bundle (b) made using the hydro-microtome (from archive of E. Kuta).