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Botany at Eastern Illinois University

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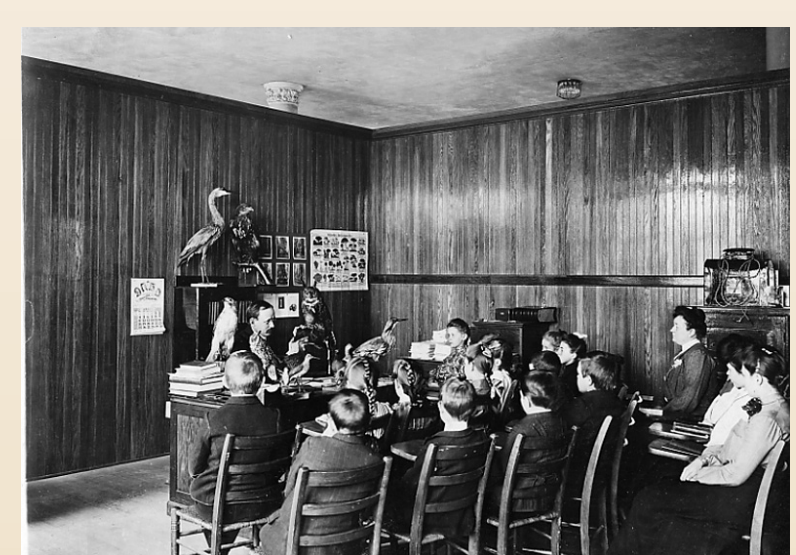
ABSTRACT: Eastern Illinois University was established in 1899, and from its beginning recognized the importance of the botanical sciences. Two terms of botany were required for the four year program. Otis W. Caldwell, a botanist, was one of the original faculty members. He taught all of the biology courses and initiated the acquisition of a greenhouse. Caldwell was the first of a series of talented and dedicated botany professors including Edgar N. Transeau, Ernest L. Stover, Hiram F. Thut and John E. Ebinger. These and many other professors incorporated a field component into almost all classes. This dedication to the study of plants in their natural habitat led to one of the finest programs in the nation for training field botanists. By 1923, a formal Botany Department was established and in the late 1960's EIU began awarding a M.S. in Botany. At this time, over 40 different undergraduate and graduate courses were offered with 95% having a lab component. The excellence of the program was recognized in Illinois where organizations such as the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Natural History Survey relied on graduates from the EIU Botany Department for their field botanists. In 1992, the American Phytopathological Society recognized the department for its contribution to plant pathology. Between 1913 and 1993, six hundred and nine students graduated with degrees in Botany, and 121 continued to receive their doctorates in botanical fields. Although numbers of botany majors rose during early to mid 1990's, an administrative decision was made in 1998 to combine the Botany Department with the Zoology Department into a Biological Sciences Department. Since the merger, the B.S. in Botany was eliminated. Unfortunately, the elimination of this Botany Department is an example of past national trends to eliminate Botany Departments even with exceptional reputations.

1899

Eastern Illinois Normal School was established as a training school for teachers, and offered teaching certificates.



Old Main was the first building on campus where all classes were taught.



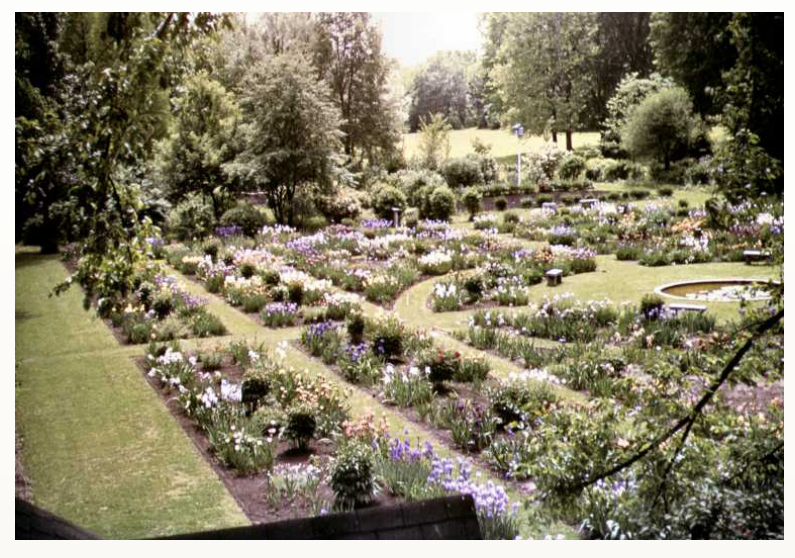
Otis W. Caldwell, botanist, was one of the 18 original faculty.

Botany was required and Zoology was an elective. The Biological Sciences Department offered General Botany, Plant Ecology, Animal Physiology, and Zoology.

1903



The greenhouse was the second building on campus.



Caldwell helped plan school gardens, where each class in the model training school had a plot.

1907



Edgar N. Transeau came to Eastern, replacing Caldwell, and offered Botany 1 & 2, Advanced Morphology of Algae and Fungi, Ecological Anatomy, Local Flora, General Principles of Evolution, the Green Algae, and Agriculture.

1915

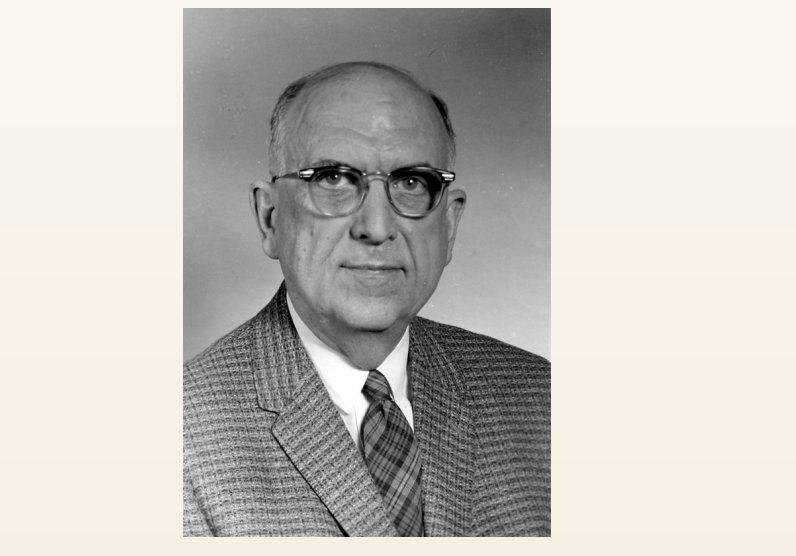
When Transeau left, his students H.C. Sampson and L.H. Tiffany followed him to The Ohio State University where the 3 collaborated on a widely used college botany textbook.

Arthur G. Vestal (1915-1920) began at Eastern and taught all botany and zoology until Earl H. Hall (1920-1923).

1920

Eastern Illinois Normal School became Eastern Illinois State Teachers College with B.S. and Ed. degrees.

1923



Ernest L. Stover became the first chair (1923-1960) of the newly formed Botany Department. He started the herbarium, named in his honor for collecting over 2000 specimens.

1940



Science Building is completed which housed 6 departments: Botany, Chemistry, Geography, Hygiene, Physics and Zoology.

1947

Botany Club established and still going strong with speakers, fundraisers, and field trips including an annual trip to the Smoky Mountains from 1950's to 2007.



Larry E. Crofutt, bacteriologist, was the advisor of Botany Club for 25 years.

Eastern Illinois State Teachers College becomes Eastern Illinois State College.

1950's

Cryptogamic Herbarium created, which now includes over 10,000 specimens of fungi and lichens.

Eastern acquired its first land gift, a 10 acre woodlot now called Bugner Acres, which was used by many botany faculty and their students.

1957

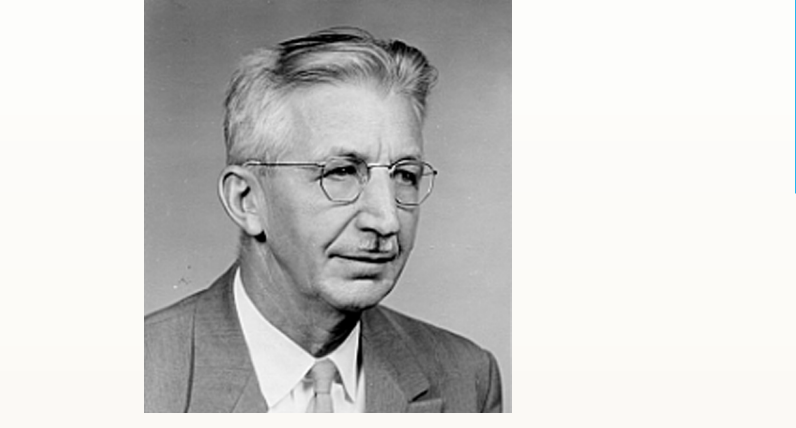
Eastern Illinois State College becomes known as Eastern Illinois University.

1958



Land on campus was given to the Botany Department for an arboretum. Nearly all of the 1,000 trees and 100 shrubs were planted by Hiram F. Thut or with his supervision.

1960



Thut became second chair of the Botany Department from 1960-1963.

Thut, in his 37 years of teaching was known for collecting and using fresh material in teaching.



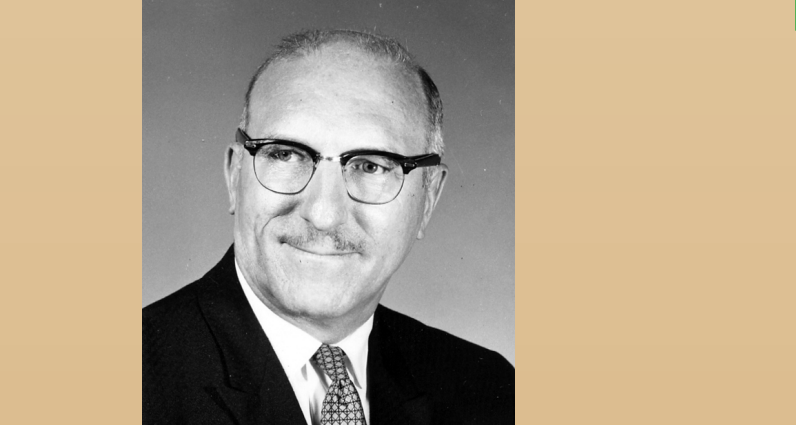
Wesley C. Whiteside (1960-1987) taught a variety of classes and established a 5 acre botanical garden in Charleston that continues to be used by faculty, students, and the community.

1962



When Thut designed the greenhouse, named in his honor, he made it twice as large because he knew that the planning committee would cut it in half... and they did.

1963



Kenneth E. Damann was department chair from 1963-1966.



The Life Science Building that housed Botany and Zoology was built.

Division of Life Sciences was created that included Botany and Zoology Departments. M.S. in Botany was established.



John E. Ebinger (1963-1995) was the first EIU faculty member to be elected a Fellow of the Illinois State Academy of Science.

1965



Charles B. Arzeni (1965-1993) developed a tropical botany class as one of the first study abroad classes at EIU.

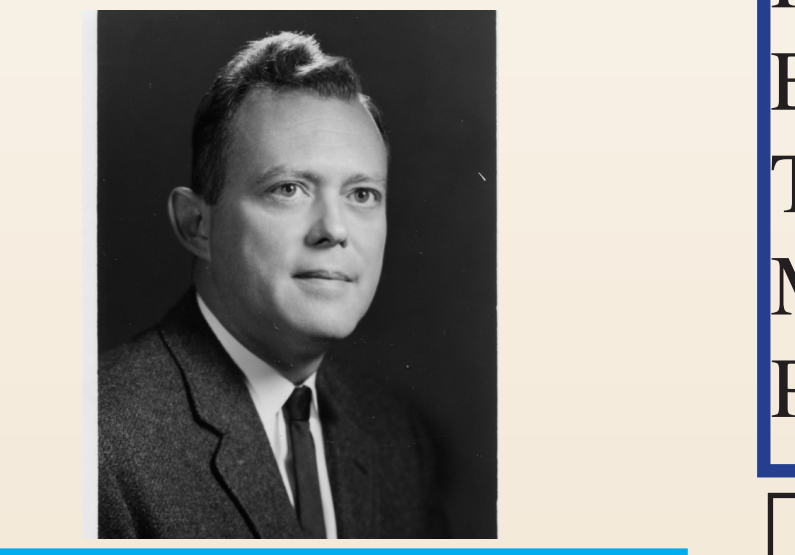
1966

John G. Husa was department chair from 1966-1968.

1968



Botany Department Faculty



William M. Scott was department chair from 1968-1976.

1969

Life Science Building Annex added.

Baber Woods, a 50 acre old growth upland forest was donated to the Nature Conservancy. It was managed and used by the Botany Department.

1971

The B.S. in Environmental Biology was added which had an internship component.

1970's

Illinois Department of Natural Resources performed statewide inventories of natural areas with almost 1/3 of their field botanists being from EIU and trained by Ebinger.

1976

Terry M. Weidner was department chair from 1976-1992, when he entered higher administration, where in Provost Office during merger years.

1979

Botany's specialized classes included Outdoor and Indoor Home Horticulture, Ethnobotany, Taxonomy of Aquatic Macrophytes, and Plant Geography.

1983



Rocky Branch, a 150 acre natural area with unique sandstone outcrops was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve. It had been managed and used by the Botany Department since the 1950's.

1985

35 undergraduate and 13 graduate classes were offered including many specialized upper division classes.

95% of Botany classes still had a lab component.

1992

William A. Weiler was department chair from 1992-1993. As faculty he was instrumental in building the EVB program.

The Botany Department was recognized by the University of Illinois Plant Pathology Department and the American Phytopathological Society for their contribution to plant pathology.

M.S. in Botany was eliminated and replaced with an M.S. in Biological Sciences.

1993



Janice M. Coons, the first and only woman department chair, served from 1993-1998. She was elected a fellow of the Illinois State Academy of Science and continues to do botanical research.

From the time Eastern started conferring B.S. degrees, 609 students had graduated in Botany with 121 (20%) continuing to receive their doctorate.

1994

Botany majors rose at EIU while botany majors at other state universities decreased. Eastern offered more plant courses than other comparable universities.

1995

The Stover Herbarium (for vascular plants) was renamed the Stover-Ebinger Herbarium to honor Ebinger who added over 20,000 specimens.

1996

At the idea of the Botany and Zoology Departments merging, many alumni and friends wrote letters which demonstrated the uniqueness and national reputation of the Botany Program.

1998

Botany and Zoology Departments merged. Then the only degrees were B.S. and M.S. in Biological Sciences.

At the time of the merger, department had 15 tenure-line Botany faculty. Today there are 8.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
 • Larry Crofutt, John Ebinger and Wesley Whiteside for personal interviews and comments.
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PHOTOGRAPHY
 • Courtesy of Booth Library Archives, Steve Malehorn and Hiram Thut.