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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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


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=gGuIQkJ524
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TedXRIsxySU
http://library.sc.edu/develop/tsmje.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
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: Ełżbieta 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 arteliniiflora* Loisel stem (a) and bundle (b) made using the hydro-microtome (from archive of E. Kuta).