

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

IRA LOREN WIGGINS (1899 – 1987)

Dr. Ira Loren Wiggins, Professor of Biology, Emeritus, died on November 28, 1987 at Lytton Gardens Health and Care Center in Palo Alto, California. He had been in failing health for nearly a year and would have been 89 on January 1st of this year.

Ira was born in Madison, Wisconsin, on January 1st, 1899. His family moved about a good deal in Ira's boyhood, eventually reaching southern California in 1908. During his youth, Ira did an incredible number of different kinds of things and worked at a variety of jobs.

He graduated from Hilman High School in San Luis Obispo County in 1918 and then entered Occidental College in Los Angeles with the intent of becoming a Presbyterian minister. The botanist then at Occidental College, Dr. Frank Jason Smiley, a Stanford graduate, had a good deal to do with attracting Ira to botany. He received his A.B. in philosophy in 1922 and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. In the following year Ira worked as a farm hand in Shasta County and got a high school teaching credential.

The next year he and Dorothy Bruce were married and Ira taught high school for a year. This was followed by a year at Stanford working for a master's degree with Dr. LeRoy Abrams. Ira's thesis was "A Systematic Study of the Pacific Coast Malvaceae" which eventually formed the treatment of that family in the third volume of Abram's Illustrated Flora of the Pacific States.

From 1925-1927 he was an Instructor at Occidental College and then returned to Stanford to study for a Ph.D., supported by a University Fellowship in Botany. His dissertation was a "Flora of San Diego County, California". The degree was awarded in 1930.

He was then appointed an Assistant Professor of Botany at Stanford and considered himself very lucky to have an academic job. He remained at Stanford until he retired as Professor of Biology, Emeritus, in 1964. Promotion to Associate Professor came in 1936, soon after the merger of the botany and zoology departments, and to Professor in 1940. Ira had curatorial appointments in the Dudley Herbarium and was director of the Natural History Museum from 1940 until 1962. For a number of years he was a member of the executive committee of the School of Biological Sciences and he served twice as acting Chairman of the Department. He taught a wide range of courses and some of his laboratory handouts are still in use at Stanford today.

Shortly after Ira joined the faculty, he started a series of trips to study the flora of Baja California, Mexico, and later to the Sonoran Desert portion of mainland Mexico. This resulted in collaboration with Dr. Forrest Shreve of the Desert Laboratory of the Carnegie Institution of Washington in Arizona. Dr. Shreve wrote the ecological and descriptive vegetational analysis of the Sonoran Desert and Ira, the floral.

The depression was a hard time for Stanford. Salaries were low and at least once reduced. Lack of funds was one of two reasons that Ira's dissertation was never published. The other was that Dr. Philip A. Munz of Pomona College had completed his Manual of Southern California Botany. Some of Ira's Baja California trips were in part financed by the sale of duplicate collections.

World War II started for the United States in December of 1941. Ira tried to enlist in the military but was considered too old. He served in other ways, working as a part time machinist at the Joshua Hendy Iron Works locally and guarding the Hetch Hetchy aqueduct. Later in the war Ira spent a about a year with the Foreign Economic Administration in Peru and Ecuador in search of Cinchona trees, the bark of which yields quinine. He was one of a dozen American botanists so employed.

At the end of World War II Stanford was bursting at the seams with students – 4,000 before and 8,000 after – creating great demands on the faculty, many of which Ira helped solve.

An opportunity came in 1949 to visit Pt. Barrow, Alaska with the view of starting some botanical exploration under the sponsorship of the Office of Naval Research. The next summer Ira took two of his graduate students, Henry J. Thompson and John Thomas, with him. We had a lot of fun that summer and eventually one of the products of our work was A Flora of the Alaskan Arctic Slope by Wiggins and Thomas. Ira spent several years at Pt. Barrow over the early 1950s as Director of the Arctic Research Laboratory.

As the Flora of the Sonoran Desert was not finished, Ira went back to that after the Alaskan interlude. It was published in 1964.

An opportunity then presented itself to go back to Ecuador, this time to the Galapagos Islands as part of an expedition, the Galapagos International Scientific Project for the University of California Extension and the California Academy of Science, in 1964. Ira eventually prepared a new Flora of those islands made so famous a century before by Charles Darwin. A number of botanists contributed to the Flora, including one of Ira's former students, Duncan M. Porter, who became the junior author. The Flora of the Galapagos Islands was published in 1971 by the Stanford University Press.

In 1959, Ira became Scientific Director of the Belvedere Scientific Fund, sponsored by Kenneth K. Bechtel. This in effect made Ira a research professor and allowed the Department to hire a very promising young man, Peter H. Raven, now Director of the Missouri Botanical Garden.

Ira's last major book was a Flora of Baja California which was published in 1980, a fitting culmination of a lifetime of pioneer exploration in Baja California.

After retirement in 1964, Ira taught at California University, Fullerton and at the University of Florida.

Ira was also active outside of the University. He served the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco as a trustee for 15 years and president from 1954 to 1959.

He was a member of the editorial committee of the Academy's journal, Pacific Discovery, for several years. He edited the American Fern Journal from 1961 to 1965, after having served as an associated editor for many years. He served as president of the California Botanical Society, the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, and the Western Society of Naturalists.

A number of honors and awards came his way: an honorary doctorate of sciences from Occidental College in 1965, the Fellows' Medal of the California Academy of Sciences, the Gleason award from the New York Botanical Garden for the Flora of the Sonoran Desert, and the Certificate of Merit from the Botanical Society of America in 1964. He was a fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America and the California Academy of Sciences.

Ira was an all-around naturalist and had an extraordinary amount of information about all kinds of plants, algae, fungi and mosses as well as the vascular plants, ferns, gymnosperm, and flowering plants, the latter being his specialty. His knowledge of animals was equally impressive and he published a number of papers on ornithology. In all, he made over 50,000 collections of plants and made important contributions to zoological collections. He published over 200 papers in addition to his books. He was a skilled botanical artist and frequently illustrated his papers himself.

Ira gave generously of himself to his students and colleagues. He was a fiercely independent person, something which many of his colleagues didn't realize. He lived life to the fullest and one never got tired of listening to him reminisce.

Several accounts of Ira have appeared in the last few years: Donald Stokes, "How a girlfriend's remark led Ira Wiggins to Botany" (Stanford University Campus Report, April 3, 1965); George Lindsay, "Ira Loren Wiggins, Naturalist" (Pacific Directory, Nov.-Dec. 1979); and Karen Bartholomew, "Ira Wiggins dies at 88: (Stanford University Campus Report, Dec. 9, 1987).

At the request of his grandchildren Ira wrote an autobiography which should be published, as he was central to so much of the history of western North and South American botany during this century.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy Bruce Wiggins of Menlo Park; a son, Bruce Wiggins of Los Altos; a daughter, Donalie W. McPherson of Vallejo; a sister, Lillian Severin of Cupertino; and seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

John H. Thomas, Chair
Lawrence R. Blinks
George E. Lindsay, California Academy of Sciences