

IN MEMORIAM
LARRY EUGENE BROWN (16 JULY 1937–2 JULY 2020)

Anita Tiller* and Friends of Dr. Larry Brown

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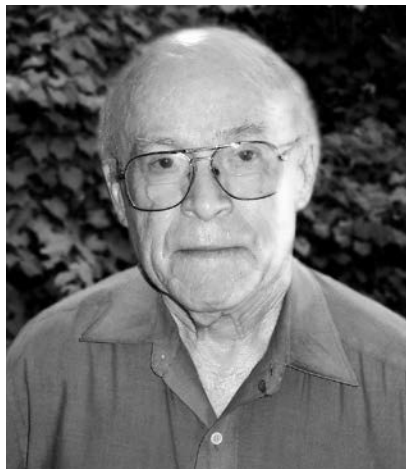


FIG. 1. Dr. Larry E. Brown, image provided by The Big Thicket Association of Texas.

Larry Eugene Brown, 82, of Houston, beloved husband, father, and grandfather, passed away peacefully at home the evening of July 2, 2020.

The son of Harold and Alice Phillips Brown, he was born at home in Belle Valley, a small town surrounded by the beautiful hills of the Appalachian Plateau in southeastern Ohio. Soon after his birth, the Brown family moved to nearby Caldwell, Ohio. As a boy, Dr. Brown grew to love the outdoors during summer Baptist church youth camps and spent an active childhood exploring Caldwell's creeks and woodlands. Although as a youth he aspired for a career in ornithology, after graduating from high school in 1955, his interest in botany blossomed as a student at Ohio University, Athens, where in 1959 he earned his B.S. in biology.

During his studies for his M.S. degree at West Virginia University at Morgantown, Dr. Brown gained practical experience in botany as a herbarium technician for the U.S. National Herbarium in Washington D.C. and the West Virginia University Herbarium (1963); a plant taxonomist at the U.S.

Forest Service Herbarium in Washington D.C. (1963–64); a plant collector for a cancer research program for the Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, MD (1964); and as a biology teacher with the Roseville, Ohio, school system.

In 1964, upon the completion of his Master's thesis titled "Distribution Maps of 144 Extraneous Plants Found in West Virginia," he moved to Texas to study under the direction of world-renowned agrostologist, Dr. Frank Walton Gould (1913–1981) who at that time curated the S.M. Tracy Herbarium (TAES/TAMU) at Texas A&M University in College Station. Dr. Brown's dissertation, "A Biosystematic Study of the *Chloris cucullata* - *Chloris verticillata* Complex" describes the taxonomic relationships of Texas populations of *Chloris verticillata*, *C. cucullata*, *C. andropogonoides*, *C. texensis*, *C. latisquamea* and *C. subdolichostachya* and variation patterns in sympatric populations resulting from hybridization. These species occur within central, southern US to NE Mexico, while the rare *C. texensis* is endemic to the Gulf Coastal Plain of Texas. Dr. Brown's extensive field collections throughout the Post Oak Savannah, South Texas Plains, Gulf Prairies and Marshes and Edwards Plateau of Texas provided specimens required for the cytological, anatomical, morphological studies for his research. Dr. Brown received a Rob and Bessie Welder Wildlife Foundation research fellowship grant (<https://welderwildlife.org/past-fellows/>) to support his doctoral research at Welder Wildlife Refuge, Sinton, Texas.

During his Ph. D studies at Texas A&M, Stephenville, he served as an Assistant Professor of Botany at Tarleton State College for the academic year 1967 to 1968 and served as an instructor of Biology at Brazosport Junior College, now Brazosport College, in Lake Jackson, Texas. During this time, he met Ruby Lee Boykin, a student at Sam Houston State Teacher's College, now Sam Houston State University, and they married at her parent's home in Channelview, Texas, on August 30, 1968. Throughout their marriage, Ruby assisted with typing and drawing scientific illustrations for his manuscripts and reports. Ruby later received an AAS degree in computer programming from San Jacinto College. The couple would have celebrated 53 years of marriage in 2021.

After Dr. Brown received his Ph.D. in May 1969, he and Ruby moved to California where he served as Instructor of Botany at the California State Polytechnic University at San Luis Obispo from 1969–1971. After their daughter Leanna 'Annie' was born, the family longed to return to Texas. Dr. Brown accepted a position as a part-time instructor of Biology at Houston Community College (HCC) in Houston, Texas in 1973. In 1976, he was promoted to Instructor of Biology.

In 1980, Dr. Brown began his service as curator for the Robert A. Vines Environmental Science Center Herbarium (SBSC) in Houston. Robert A. Vines (1907–1978) founded the SBSC herbarium in 1967 during Vines' tenure as Science Supervisor for the Spring Branch Independent School District (SBISD), Houston. In 1985, Dr. Brown was appointed to the position of Research Associate in Plant Taxonomy for the SBSC herbarium. In 1999, SBISD awarded Dr. Brown 'SBISD Volunteer of the Month' for May for the district. Linda Buchman, Associate Superintendent for Community Relations for SBISD comments, "On behalf of everyone in Spring Branch ISD, we send our thoughts, prayers, and condolences to Dr. Brown's family. We were grateful for his many years of unique work to build an amazing collection of native plants through the Herbarium he nurtured with so much love and care. We are grateful to the Botanic Gardens for continuing to nurture Dr. Brown's legacy and life's work." Charles Peterson, former Assistant Director of the SBSC and Curator of the SBSC Herbarium reminisces, "It was my privilege to know and spend time with Dr. Brown. Larry was an excellent field botanist, a serious plant collector, who enjoyed doing plant surveys. Together Dr. Brown and I wrote a book, *Vascular Flora of the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary San Jacinto County, Texas*, led botany trips, traveled, and worked side by side in the SBSC Herbarium. His time was also divided as an educator and being with his loving family. Dr. Brown referred to himself in his mailing address as 'The Plant Man.'"

Dr. Brown taught as a Visiting Instructor at Rice University, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and regularly taught botany courses at the University of Houston - Clear Lake. His excellence as a teacher earned him an Outstanding Performance Award (1984); a Community Service Award from the Bedichek Faculty Development Fund (1989); and a Sabbatical Award during spring semester 2001–2002 as faculty at the HCC. He retired from HCC in 2006. Dr. Brown authored over 40 publications, shown in the list below, including laboratory books, botanical floras, checklists, an endangered species recovery plan, and research publications in *American Journal of Botany*, *Sida/The Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas*, *Phytologia*, and *Phytoneuron*.

In 1994, the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) awarded Stephan L. Hatch, Kancheepuram N. Gandhi, and Larry E. Brown the **Donovan Stewart Correll Memorial Award** for scientific writing in the field of the native flora of Texas for the book, *Checklist of the Vascular Plants of Texas*. In 2002, the statewide membership of NPSOT recognized Dr. Brown's life-long dedicated service to the preservation of the native flora of Texas and awarded him with 'The **Charles Leonard Weddle Memorial Award** for lifetime achievement in the field of Texas native plants.

Dr. Brown's many years of service as field trip leader for NPSOT's Houston Chapter helped train and inspire botanists of all ages. These family-friendly trips often included his own children and grandchildren and served as fun and educational excursions for all that participated. Lan Shen, member of the Houston Chapter of NPSOT remarks, "I still miss those NPSOT-Houston field trips that he used to lead where we learned the plants and their scientific names. Since I do not have the patience to learn to key out plants, those field trips were where I learned our local plants - by repetition over the years during the 3 spring & 3 fall field

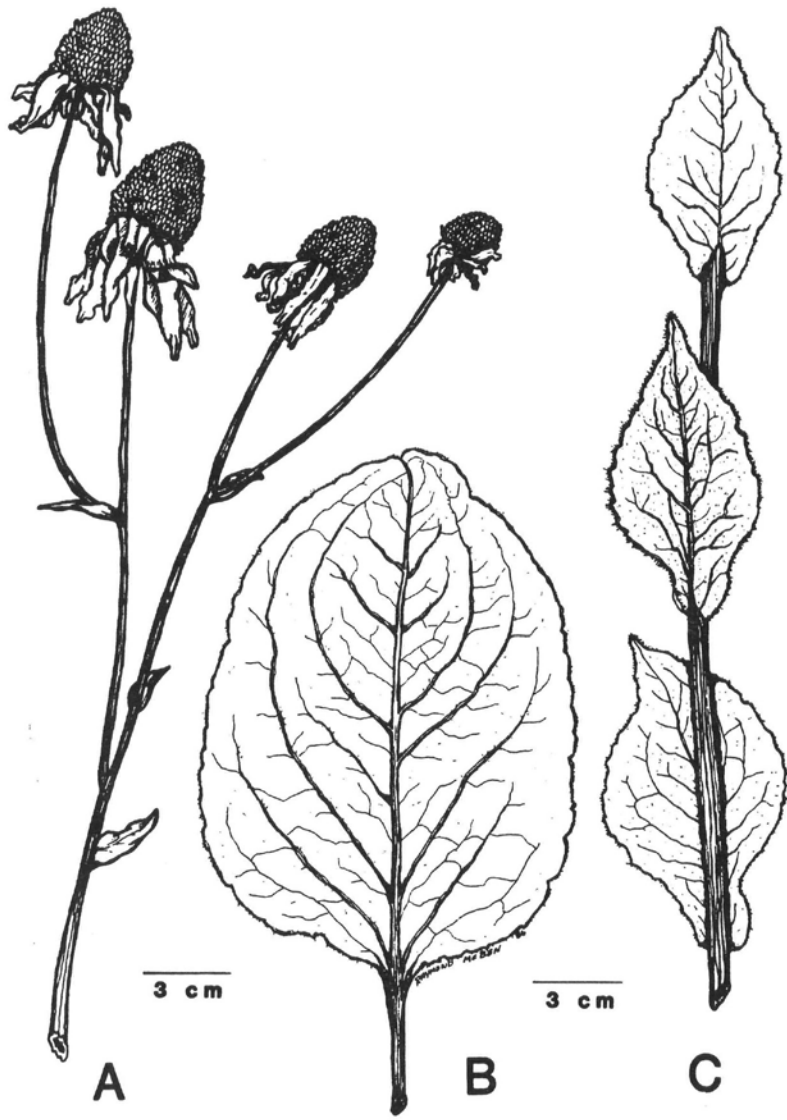


Fig. 1. *Rudbeckia scabrifolia* (from holotype).
A, inflorescence; B, basal leaf; C, upper culm leaves.

Fig. 2. *Rudbeckia scabrifolia* L.E.Br., bog coneflower, an East Texas hillside bog species, described as a new species by Dr. Brown in 1986. Drawing by Raymond McBen of HCC.

trips. He taught so many of us.” Jaime Gonzalez of The Nature Conservancy-Texas Chapter comments, “Truly a monumental loss. Dr. Brown was such a transformative figure in Texas botany and helped to create generations of naturalists with a love of native plants. I will always treasure his field trips.”

Dr. Brown conducted countless field surveys for countless organizations, both private and governmental, throughout East Texas. Houston-area environmental scientist, Ally Altemose, comments, “I know many of my colleagues have been inspired by Dr. Brown and have learned so much from him. ...Dr. Brown was truly



FIG. 3. Dr. Brown with Kelly Walker and Warren Pruess, Native Plant Society of Texas, Houston Chapter field trip to Memorial Park, image by Linda Knowles, March 21, 2010.

a treasure, and he will be deeply missed.” Those of us who attended field surveys with him remember his amazing stamina in the field and his typical field gear...a set of Walkman headphones that allowed him to enjoy radio programs while vouchering plants!

Not only has NPSOT-Houston and Mercer Botanic Gardens, but so have most of the Houston area non-profit nature organizations benefited from his service. Mary Anne Piacentini, President of The Katy Prairie Conservancy in Houston shares, “I am so sorry to hear about Dr. Brown. He was always so generous with his time and his expertise. He will be missed.” Former botanist for Mercer Botanic Gardens, Cara Day reminisces, “Whenever Dr. Larry Brown is mentioned, I first think of his wry smile and that true twinkle in his eye. I will forever treasure my memories of him as the most forbearing teacher and playful mentor. He introduced me to East Texas flora, and he is the reason I’ve become so familiar with and gained so much appreciation for native plants. He is the real deal, in both scientific and human terms! Much love and gratitude to him and his family for sharing a genuine, unique soul with the community.”

Dr. Brown’s “Checklist of Vascular Plants of the Houston Area” continues to serve as a go-to reference for

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FIG. 4. Authors of the *Vascular Flora of the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary*, Dr. Brown and Charles Peterson, leading Native Plant Society of Texas, Houston Chapter field trip at the Little Thicket Sanctuary, San Jacinto County. Photo by Leanna Harper, June 2014.

botanists and citizen scientists in the Houston metro area and surrounding counties. Dr. Brown collected nearly 40,000 specimens and contributed to numerous herbaria, including SBSC, Texas A&M (TAES/TAMU), UT (TEX/LL), BRIT, Lamar University (LAMU), Mercer Botanic Gardens (MERCA). TAES botanist Monique Reed comments, "I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take a multi-day field trip through South Texas to Big Bend and back with Larry and a few others. What that man did not know about Texas plants would fit in a teaspoon. I consider myself fortunate now to be working with his many, many specimens housed at the TAES Herbarium at Texas A&M. His contributions to botany will be a lasting testament to his knowledge, dedication, and outreach. Rest in peace, and I hope there are new plants in heaven for you to marvel at." Joe Liggio, author with his late wife Ann Orto Liggio of the reference book *The Wild Orchids of Texas* remarks about Dr. Brown's expertise as a taxonomist, "It is so sad that we lost Dr. Larry Brown. His ability for identifying unknown plants was just remarkable, unmatched by even the best trained botanists. Larry, like a child with a new toy, was so delighted by every new plant he encountered. I remember the time Dr. Brown traveled to New Zealand as a botanical consultant for an environmental project. He was able to identify all of

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FIG. 5. Dr. Brown, birding and botanizing in Corpus Christi, a favorite vacation site for the family, image by Leanna Harper.



FIG. 6. Dr. Brown attending seed-banking workshop at Mercer Botanic Gardens, Humble, Texas, taught by seed biologists with the Millennium Seed Bank Program of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England, and Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin. Photo by Suzanne Chapman, August 19, 2005.



FIG. 7. Dr. Brown with rare prairie species, *Thurovia triflora* Rose, three-flower thurovia, in foreground, Harris County, Texas. Photo by Anita Tiller, December 2, 2013.

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the many specimens he collected using dichotomous botanical keys for New Zealand flora, a daunting task for someone from another continent working in an unfamiliar place.”

Dale A. Kruse, Curator, TAES/TAMU comments, “I never had the opportunity to interact with Larry in the field. However, Larry spent a considerable amount of time at the S.M. Tracy Herbarium in his later years. Larry was always a delight to have around the herbarium. Despite his advancing years, Larry would drive from Houston to College Station on a weekly basis to methodically annotate collections from various parts of the state, especially those collected in the Big Thicket (region of East Texas). Larry made significant contributions to the herbarium, in both specimens and time, he will be hard to replace. As evidenced by the numerous floristic surveys and resulting publications concerning the flora of the Big Thicket National Preserve (BTNP) (<https://www.nps.gov/bith/index.htm>), Larry took a particular interest in the unique biota of the (Big Thicket) region. Along with Geraldine Watson, Larry was one of the most prolific collectors in the preserve since its formation in 1974. Larry conducted the fieldwork for the Beaumont Unit publication but was unable to see the final publication of the results due to his declining health.” The flora of the Beaumont Unit is in preparation by Dale A. Kruse (TAES/TAMU) and Anita A. Tiller (MERCA) and will bear Dr. Brown as first author.

Mary Catherine Johnston states in The Big Thicket Association (BTA) (<https://www.bigthicket.org/>) November 2020 Press Release that the BTA, as the non-profit support arm for the BTNP, awarded the R.E. Jackson Conservation Award to Dr. Brown in 2012. Johnston explains that this prestigious award named after R.E. Jackson who began the Big Thicket preservation movement in the late 1920s, recognizes leadership and service and extraordinary and outstanding contributions to conservation and scientific research. Johnston acknowledges Dr. Brown’s life work and his service as BTA’s Thicket of Diversity, All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (<https://www.thicketofdiversity.org/>) Vascular Plant Inventory Group Leader. Johnston states that Dr. Brown’s work for the BTNP is part of the National Park Service database and assists the stewardship decision-making of the park’s resource managers. Dr. Brown published annotated check lists of the vascular flora of the BTNP’s Turkey Creek, Big Sandy, Lance Rosier, Beech Creek, Loblolly, Menard Creek Corridor, Jack Gore, Neches Bottom, and Hickory Creek units.

Wendy Jo Ledbetter, Executive Director, BTA states, “On behalf of the Big Thicket Association please accept our heartfelt sympathy with the passing of Dr. Brown. Dr. Brown was a joy to be in the field with and offered so much to others for learning about the native flora of our state. His inventory work of the BTNP and other conservation lands in southeast Texas remains of value for ecologists and land managers. I personally will miss his quiet, but spirited demeanor, his wry smile and twinkle of the eye! A fun person indeed. He always was quick to help on a plant ID or have a chat on plant ecology. He will be missed! May you find comfort in each other, good memories, and the beauty of our natural world.”

Dr. Brown’s service to Mercer Botanic Gardens, a Harris County Precinct 4 Parks Department facility in Humble, Texas (<https://www.hcp4.net/parks/mercer/>), guided the development of MERCA and in 1999, he vouchered and prepared a checklist for approximately 600 native and naturalized species on the then 256-acre Mercer Botanic Gardens property. MERCA is named The Dr. Larry E. Brown Herbarium in his honor. His knowledge of rare Texas plant species has been invaluable to plant conservation efforts in Texas. His plant discoveries include a new species of *Rudbeckia* (Asteraceae) the rare *R. scabrifolia* L.E. Br. of hillside bogs of East Texas as published in *Phytologia* in 1986. In 1989, Dr. Brown co-authored the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recovery plan for the rare endemic saline prairie species, Texas prairie dawn, *Hymenoxys texana* (Asteraceae) with former Mercer botanist Steve Young, and has assisted Mercer for numerous rare plant surveys and seed collections for the Center for Plant Conservation National Collection of Endangered Plants. Dr. David Rosen, professor at Lee College in Houston and former USFWS biologist for the Texas Coastal Ecological Service Office in Houston remarked in 2020, “Just heard the sad news that we lost this great man. We spent many memorable hours in the field and herbarium together. He was a great friend and mentor. I’ll miss him.”

Following his retirement, Dr. Brown requested that Mercer Botanic Gardens adopt and manage the SBSC herbarium collections. The collections were transferred to Mercer Botanic Gardens’ research facility, the

Mercer Botanical Center, from 2016 to 2017 as a long-term loan from the SBISD. This long-term loan includes more than 50,000 herbarium specimens including collections by Dr. Brown and Robert A. Vines. By February 2020, the Botanical Center's volunteers and interns had inventory-databased the nearly 44,000 mounted SBSC specimens and georeferenced select taxa, including species of greatest conservation need. Volunteers restore specimen sheets and replace worn folders. To date, 22 new single-door full height steel herbarium cabinets and one new steel art cabinet replace the SBSC's wooden cabinets for a total of 47 steel collection cabinets. The collections are located on the second floor of the Botanical Center. Hurricane screens protect the windows, and a stand-by generator serves the building. The Texas and Oklahoma specimens will be imaged over the next years though coordination with TAES and BRIT via the NSF grant "Digitization TCN: Collaborative: American Crossroads: Digitizing the Vascular Flora of the South-Central United States," and made available worldwide. The SBSC loan to Mercer Botanic Gardens also includes nearly 2,400 pen-and-ink botanical illustrations commissioned by Robert Vines for Vines' unpublished book about the flora of the Gulf Coast and more than 1,000 botanical books and journals. Dr. Brown also donated his personal botanical reference library of more than 960 holdings to Mercer Botanic Gardens' library housed at the Mercer Botanical Center. Volunteers cataloged and filed the illustrations into archival boxes and continue to catalog journal articles and repair damaged books. The catalog for this non-lending library may be accessed online at <https://opac.library-world.com/opac/home.php> under "MercerLibrary" login, no password required. The library and herbarium are available via appointment (<https://secureservercdn.net/45.40.150.47/kpt.47a.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Herbarium-Trifold-Volunteer-Brochure.pdf>).

A kind and generous individual, Dr. Brown always made time for students and friends, and he was a dedicated husband, parent, and grandfather. Camping trips and travels throughout the US and Canada with his family helped instill the love of nature and geography in his children. Daughter Annie Harper, an avid bird-watcher, delights over the memory of the Brown family's "Big Day" birding field adventure to South Texas after viewing the 2011 comedic birding movie "The Big Year." Son Mike Brown maintains an amazing garden collection of carnivorous plants at his home in Houston. Grandson Roland Harper shared this comment on July 16, 2020, "Today is his birthday and I can only think to myself and dream of all the good times with him, he was my father figure, he was the person I looked up to more than anyone else and I just wish he could see me today and be proud of who I am and what I'm doing. I will forever love my grandpa." Dr. Brown had a wonderful sense of humor and enjoyed comedies especially the 1930s to 1950s radio show, "Lum and Abner." As typical of most Aggie graduates, Dr. Brown loved the thrills of watching college football.

Dr. Brown is survived by his wife Ruby Brown of Houston; his son Michael Eugene Brown of Houston; his daughter "Annie" Leanna Kathryn Harper of Arkansas; his sister Dolores Brown-Lashley of Ohio; his brother Danny Brown of Ohio; and his delightful grandchildren, Jonah Brown, Alex Brown, Patrick Harper, Sam Harper, Roland Harper and granddaughter-in-law Katie Harper. Dr. Brown was preceded in death by his father Harold Brown, his mother Alice Phillips Brown and his brother Alan Brown.

Dr. Brown will be missed by his beloved family. He will be missed as a dear friend and mentor by his students, friends, former colleagues and missed for his amazing contributions to the knowledge about the flora of Texas. A memorial will be planned for a future date and will be announced via Dignity Memorial at <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/houston-tx/larry-brown-9249338>. Condolences and memories may be entered to the webpage above for his friends and family. Memorial contributions may be made to the Native Plant Society of Texas – Houston Chapter at <https://npsot.org/wp/houston/contacts-us/> and to The Mercer Society - Mercer Botanic Gardens in support of the Dr. Larry Brown Herbarium Collections in Dr. Brown's memory at www.themercersociety.org.

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