

BOOK REVIEW

BARBARA M. THIERS. 2020. **Herbarium: The Quest to Preserve and Classify the World's Plants.** (ISBN-13: 978-1-60469-930-2, hbk). Timber Press, Inc., The Haseltine Building, 133 S.W. Second Avenue, Suite 450, Portland, Oregon 97204-3527, U.S.A. (**Orders:** timberpress.com). \$40.00 US, 304 pp., color photographs throughout, select references, select herbaria, photo credits, index, 9" × 10¼".

There may be no better way to learn about the history of botany and herbaria than through the lens of the former director of the second-largest herbarium in the world, Dr. Barbara M. Thiers. Thiers was no stranger to plant presses and herbarium cabinets when she became director, as she was the daughter of the herbarium curator and founder of the Harry D. Thiers Herbarium at San Francisco State University. In *Herbarium*, Thiers expertly delivers centuries of botanical history from various geographies around the world.

Thiers brings her readers back in time to the early 1500s and begins to lay out the foundation and various characters that play a role in the origin story of herbaria. It was not all easy going from the outset, as is obvious in the recounting of European travelers' anecdotes from the early age of botanical exploration. Along the way there have been intellectual feuds as well as physical ones against other botanists and nature itself in the quest to discover and name plants. Although there are many countries with unique botanical histories, Thiers presents a condensed summary for the United States, Australia, Brazil, China, and South Africa including stories of early exploration, founding botanists, and the modern documentation and herbaria.

While the emphasis in the book is on vascular plants, Thiers does not fail to mention other interesting collections that can also be found in herbaria. There were several botanists over time that made important contributions to our knowledge of algae, bryophytes, fungi, lichen, and others. She also tackles the pressing issue of the insecurity of the future of herbaria and their invaluable collections. Herbaria can play a critical role in predicting global atmospheric and biodiversity changes as we face the perils of climate change. However, lack of staffing, insufficient infrastructure, funding, and potential natural disasters threaten the very existence of herbaria and other natural history collections that cater to not only researchers but local communities.

This hardcover book is not only reader-friendly, but can easily act as a lovely addition to a coffee table display. Enjoy beautiful pictures and botanical illustrations scattered throughout the text as you comb through this book. Thiers' presentation of the history, the present, and the future of herbaria truly brings life to these dead and dried plant specimens. Every reader will come away from *Herbarium* with more appreciation for the explorers, scientists, curators, and volunteers all over the world that have contributed to herbaria and our understanding of the botanical realm. To quote Thiers' final words in *Herbaria*, "We owe it to these heroes, to ourselves, and to future generations to continue this tradition, to help ensure a future in which plants and fungi continue not only to provide the fundamental needs for our existence but also to delight our sense and imagination."

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