

IN MEMORIAM

KENTON L. CHAMBERS (27 SEPTEMBER 1929–22 MAY 2024)

Henny Chambers

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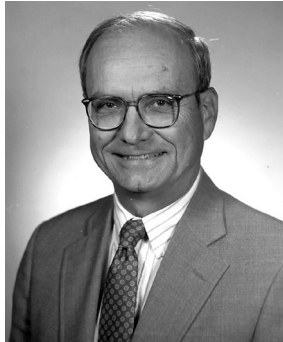
Henny Chambers remembrances

Kenton L. Chambers passed away on May 22, 2024, at Good Samaritan Regional Hospital after a brief illness. He was born in Los Angeles, California, on September 27, 1929, to Maynard Macy Chambers and Edna (Miller) Chambers. Ken spent his early years in Pasadena, Whittier and Laguna Beach. He was active in Boy Scouts, attaining the rank of Eagle Scout. He took piano lessons from an early age, sang in a boys choir, and played baritone horn in junior high and trombone in high school and college. He graduated from Paso Robles HS in 1946 and attended Whittier College on a four-year scholarship. He majored in biology and graduated in 1950 with highest honors. While at Whittier, Ken became an accomplished chess player.

Ken's post-graduate studies continued at Stanford University with an emphasis in botany. He received his Ph.D in 1955 and did post-

doctoral work at UCLA. In 1956, he joined the faculty in the Department of Botany at Yale University. Ken met his future wife, Henrietta Laing, at Yale and they were married in June 1958. Their daughter Elaine was born in New Haven in 1960 and son David was born in 1961 in Corvallis.

In 1960, Ken accepted a position in the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology at Oregon State College (now OSU). His research on several genera of Asteraceae (Compositae) allowed for Ken to have field studies over the next 30 years in Oregon and California. He mentored 15 Ph.D. students and 16 Masters students. Ken took a leave from OSU in 1967 when he chaired the Systematic Biology Program for NSF in Washington, DC. In the mid-1970s, Ken became involved with an



Ken Chambers faculty picture of 1989.

Oregon state task force on rare and endangered plants which culminated in co-authorship of *Rare, Threatened and Endangered Vascular Plants in Oregon*. He was a member of many professional societies including The American Society of Plant Taxonomists where he served as president in 1979. In 1989, the year before Ken retired from OSU, he received the OSU Alumni Distinguished Professor Award and a Certificate of Merit from the Botanical Society of America. In 1991, he was elected a Fellow to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and in 2006, a Botanical Society of America Centennial



Ken Chambers and his boy scout picture of 1946.



Ken Chambers and his baritone horn.



Fig. 1. Ken (80 years) at an Oregon State University gathering.

Ken was born in Los Angeles on September 27, 1929, graduated from Whittier College in 1950, pursued his Ph.D. at Stanford, later shifted to Yale, and in 1960 came to Oregon State University where I first met him. Details on his life, achievements and honors at the time of his retirement were reported by his wife (see *Kalmiopsis*, a Journal of the Native Plant Society of Oregon, 2001, pgs. 1–50; https://www.npsoregon.org/kalmiopsis/kalmiopsis_v08.pdf). Ken excelled in finding rare plants, especially members of the Asteraceae, and greatly assisted in writing chapters for the books on Oregon Flora.

After 30 years of teaching plant systematics, plant evolution, agrostology, and curating the herbarium, Ken officially retired (Fig. 1). According to his wife, official retirement was when Ken decided to pursue previous and new activities, such as music (piano and baritone horn) and chess.



Fig. 3. Ken used herbarium specimens to assist in finding characters matching those on fossil flowers.

Award for exemplary service to Plant Science. Ken was the author or co-author of over 200 peer-reviewed papers.

In 1974, Ken and his family built a log cabin from a pre-fab kit on property in Camp Sherman that has become a favorite family destination for 50 years. After Ken retired, he volunteered on the Oregon Flora Project and then collaborated with Dr. George Poinar on publishing 40 species of ancient flowers imbedded in amber. He and Henny enjoyed taking cruise vacations. He performed in eight Gilbert & Sullivan operettas at OSU and played baritone horn in the Corvallis Community and New Horizons bands. He started writing long palindromes to the enjoyment of friends and family and a collection of them will be published in his memory.

George Poinar remembrances

Kenton Lee Chambers passed away on May 22, 2024, in Corvallis, Oregon, as a result of cardiac arrest. He is survived in Corvallis by his wife, Henny, who is also a botanist.

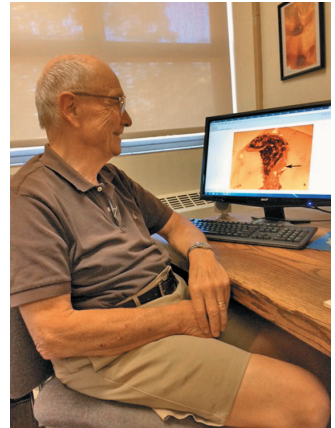


Fig. 2. Ken examining features of a fossil flower being described in amber.

I will always remember the day I walked into the small office he shared with another retiree and showed him a 100 million-year-old flower. While Ken was quite knowledgeable with living plants, to my knowledge, he had never examined or described any fossil species. He became quite excited and was very anxious to describe it. One description led to another and we soon became good colleagues.

I obtained amber specimens with flowers from various sources, performed any necessary cutting, sanding and polishing, then photographed different features of each flower. Ken examined the photographs on his computer (Fig. 2) and used his past knowledge as well as herbarium specimens (Fig. 3) and university library facilities (Fig. 4) to assist him in placing fossil flowers from Burmese, Dominican, Baltic, and Mexican amber into taxonomic categories.

Ken became preoccupied in making new scientific names for these flowers. Our manuscripts were always sent to Barney Lipscomb for publication in the *Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas*.

One of the first flowers we examined was described in the genus



FIG. 4. Ken also used numerous reference works to discover the affinities of ancient flowers.

After reaching the age of 93, Ken decided that *Endobeuthos paleosum* was actually a capitular, unisexual inflorescence of the Australian family Protaceae. This description was the last paper that Ken wrote and was published shortly before he passed away.

Ken continued to publish after reaching the age of 90 (Fig. 6). His mind remained as “sharp as a tack.” During his retirement, Ken published 40 papers on the systematics of amber flowers. References to these are recorded in the book *Flowers in Amber* that was dedicated to Ken.



FIG. 6. Ken was still actively publishing at 90 years.

Tropidogyne. Flowers of this genus were the most common in Burmese amber. They are quite striking with their 5 extended sepals with dark veins (Fig. 5).

Ken and I would spend hours discussing the possible systematic placement of the specimens before writing the final manuscript. Sometimes, decisions lasted several days.

We were often amazed at finding specific features on amber flowers. For instance, on a Burmese flower we named *Zygadelphus aethus*, a second set of anthers grew out of the first set. Thus there were only 4 stamens but 8 anthers. Such piggyback anthers have never been reported on any other flower, extinct or extant.

But Ken was unsure of the assignment of *Endobeuthos* and continued to ponder its placement.

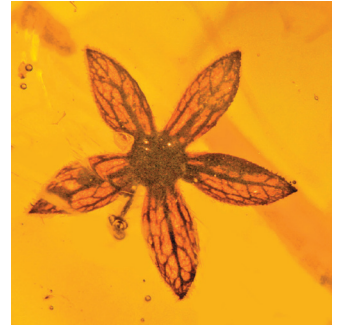


FIG. 5. *Tropidogyne pentaptera* in Burmese amber.