

IN MEMORIAM:

NEIL ARTHUR HARRIMAN (1 AUGUST 1938–7 DECEMBER 2018)

Colleagues and Friends of Neil Harriman

Oshkosh Northwestern, 10 December 2018

Neil Arthur Harriman died at home on 7 December 2018 after a rather lengthy decline in his health.

Neil A. Harriman was born on 1 August 1938 in St. Louis, Missouri, the only son of Ruth and John Harriman. He grew up in St. Louis along with his older sister, Ruth. Neil received his Bachelor of Arts from Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1960, followed by a Doctor of Philosophy from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, in Biology in January 1965.

While at Vanderbilt, Neil met Bettie Ralph and they were married on 13 July 1963. Together, they moved to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in September of 1964 when Neil joined the Biology Department faculty at University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, primarily to teach botany classes and do plant taxonomy research. Neil remained at UWO until his retirement in May, 1998.

Neil was a dedicated teacher and found great satisfaction in not only teaching about botanical information, but helping the students learn to be life-long learners. It gave him much pleasure that three of his students went on to get their own Ph.D.'s in Botany: Robert Jansen, Bruce Parfitt (deceased), and Melanie DeVore. His research work of collecting, identifying, and conserving plants was also a pleasure to him. When Neil arrived on campus in 1964, the herbarium facility in Halsey Science was barely more than a room with cabinets waiting to be filled with dried, identified and properly labeled plants, arranged in a systematic fashion. Today it houses almost 125,000 specimens from around the world, including over seventy type specimens; three of these document species named in Neil's honor: *Flyriella harrimanii*, *Lundellianthus harrimanii*, and *Phyllanthus harrimanii*. After Neil's retirement, the university named the herbarium in his honor. The Neil A. Harriman Herbarium contains not only plant specimens, but Neil's extensive personal botanical library as well.

Neil belonged to numerous botanical societies during his career, including American Society of Plant Taxonomists, for which he served a three-year term as Secretary and Program Chairman, and the International Association for Plant Taxonomy. He served as Editor of *The Michigan Botanist* for many years, and as a reviewer and author in the Flora of North America project of the Missouri Botanical Garden. Over the years he published numerous scientific articles in the journals of these societies.

During his 34 years as a member of the UWO faculty, Neil received a number of awards and recognitions. In 1973–74, he was given the Citation as an Outstanding Teacher. In May 1986, Neil was named a John McNaughton Rosebush University Professor for Excellence in Teaching and Professional Achievement. In 1993 he received the UWO Endowment for Excellence - The TRISS Endowed Professorship.

When Neil retired in 1998, he was named Professor Emeritus of Biology and Microbiology at UWO by the Board of Regents and continued to work in the herbarium as long as his health allowed.

Neil's joy for editing the written word extended beyond botany as did his willingness to "help-out" when needed. During his retirement, Neil joined his wife Bettie as co-editors for the quarterly journal of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology from 2003–2014. He also contributed his editing skills to the production of the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Wisconsin*, a 600-page book published by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology in 2006.

The essence of Dr. Neil A. Harriman is perfectly stated by one of his graduate students, Tom Eddy: "Forty years ago, as a young graduate candidate at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, I was encouraged by Dr. Neil A. Harriman to conduct a systemic study of the vascular flora of Green Lake County. My thesis research and association with Neil resulted in a profound change in my life trajectory, both personally and professionally.

"Besides our independent plant collecting, Neil and I participated in numerous botanical outings organized by the Botanical Club of Wisconsin. Neil's taxonomic knowledge was encyclopedic. He exercised a



Dr. Neil A. Harriman. UW Oshkosh Archives.

superlative command of language and proper use of grammar. Whether in lecture or private conversation, he could turn what first appeared to be a collection of unrelated facts into a relevant lesson, frequently accompanied by humorous euphemisms.

“Neil was an unpretentious and modest person, preferring not to draw attention to himself. In 2009, the herbarium which Neil founded in 1964, was dedicated in his honor: the Neil A. Harriman Herbarium. While such an honor might offer one an opportunity to grandstand, Neil chose not to speak at this ceremonious tribute.



Volunteer botanists conducting botany blitz at Wisconsin's North Fork Eau Claire River State Natural Area, 2 August 2009: Left to right: Thomas Eddy, Alvin Bogdansky, Brian Neil, Emmet Judziewicz, Laurie Yahr, Neil Harriman, Joe Rohrer. Photo by Thomas Eddy.



Dr. Neil A. Harriman and Dr. Richard H. Wells (2009). UW Oshkosh Archives.

“The natural world was held in reverence by Neil. Whether botanizing a natural area, roadside right-of-way or parking lot, his eye was trained on the ground. Besides collecting new plant records, Neil regularly collected and properly disposed of someone else’s litter.

“Neil gifted generously to his local animal shelter. He held a tender spot for cats and dogs waiting to be adopted. On numerous occasions I witnessed a similar mindfulness by Neil toward other peoples’ lives whose unfortunate circumstances were less than ideal. He was generous, big-hearted and aspired for the common good. For all this, I owe Neil a debt of gratitude for his mentorship and unflagging friendship.”

Neil is survived by his wife Bettie and many friends who offered comfort and assistance with his care. His final week was under the excellent care of Aurora At Home hospice care which gave much physical support and comfort to Neil in a most experienced and professional manner while at the same time providing an easy emotional and caring support for Bettie.

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University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh (OSH)—The herbarium at OSH was officially named in honor of its founder and Curator Emeritus, Dr. Neil A. Harriman on September 8, 2009, as part of opening-day ceremonies for the new academic year. University Chancellor Dr. Richard H. Wells presented Harriman with a framed certificate that read in part, “For over four decades, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh professor emeritus Neil Harriman has focused his attention and expertise on the establishment, development and collection of materials that will be perpetually used by students, faculty and staff as well as scientists, scholars and researchers from across the global community. This collection is recognized as one of the largest and best in the state of Wisconsin and will benefit all citizens in northeastern Wisconsin and beyond.” The herbarium was established by Harriman at the time of his arrival on campus in 1964. By the time of his retirement in 1998, OSH had grown from a few cabinets and a handful of teaching specimens to a well-curated facility housing almost 100,000 vascular plant specimens from around the globe and a botanical library of nearly 4,000 volumes plus major runs of serials and a large collection of reprints.

Since retiring and accepting the title of Curator Emeritus, Harriman has continued to work in the herbarium on an almost daily basis, collecting, mounting, filing, and identifying specimens. Today, accessions total over 117,000 sheets, approximately half from outside Wisconsin. The facility continues to be used daily by his successor in meeting the teaching, research, and service missions of the university.

Tribute from a former student.

Neil Harriman epitomized the standard for capacity building for plant taxonomy. Capacity building is installing an understanding of taxonomy and teaching the skills necessary for the next generation to carry the field forward. Neil is responsible for mentoring one of the most respected botanists and honored high school conservation instructors in the state of Wisconsin, Thomas Eddy. Three of his former students went on to earn PhDs and followed three very different research paths. All of us learned to collect, identify, label, mount, and curate hundreds of specimens while we were students working with Neil at UW-Oshkosh. Bob Jansen became a leader in molecular systematics. Bruce Parfitt had a gift for floristic work and like Neil, training students in collections-based work. I landed in systematic paleobotany, and to this day, I realize my eye and ability to identify and put dead plants back together was developed by collecting, identifying, labeling and filing herbarium specimens.

Musicians collect songs and a good plant taxonomist collects literature. Both are versed in the history and contributors of their respective fields. Before writing this, I turned off Ken Burn's country music documentary, the episode where Rosanne Cash described how she learned to become a songwriter. Johnny Cash gave her a list of required songs to learn which illustrated the best techniques of songwriting. Neil had every book, monograph and journal imaginable for us to read and use. He also would leave copies of books and items on our desks that he felt we should read. For example, I found Steve Manchester's monograph of fossil Juglandaceae and Beryl Simpson's economic botany text on my desk. I try to encourage students to have their own interests. However, Neil taught me the necessity to teach the fundamentals needed for my own students to carry plant taxonomy forward.—*Melanie DeVore*

From the editor of the *Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas* (formerly *Sida, Contr. Bot.*).

Neil was a good friend and a wonderful colleague and always willing to help with any editorial or publishing need. Neil was a lifetime subscriber and supporter and a regular contributor to *Sida, Contributions to Botany* and the *Journal of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas*. I could always count on Neil for book reviews as well as timely and thorough reviews and editing of manuscript submissions. Thanks, Neil for all of your help over the many years.—*Barney Lipscomb*