Aliso: A Journal of Systematic and Floristic Botany

Volume 37
Issue 1 *Issue 1–2*

Article 3

2019

Remembering Lee W. Lenz (1915–2019)

Aliso, 37(1–2), pp. 74–76
ISSN: 0065-6275 (print), 2327-2929 (online)

REMEMBERING LEE W. LENZ (1915–2019)

This obituary draws on several sources, published[1] *and unpublished, written by J. Travis Columbus, James Henrickson, Lucinda McDade, Carol Wilson and Linda Worlow.*

On 27 October 2019, Dr. Lee Wayne Lenz, Director Emeritus of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (RSABG)[2], passed away at the age of 104. Born and raised in Bozeman, Montana, Lee graduated from Bozeman High School in the early 1930s. His interest in plants was already evident at this time, choosing botany as his Major while attending Montana State College in Bozeman. Lee completed the next phases of his higher education at the University of Minnesota and Louisiana State University, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in 1937. He completed his doctoral studies at the Henry Shaw School of Botany at Missouri Botanical Garden (affiliated with Washington University, St. Louis) under the mentorship of noted botanist Dr. Edgar Anderson, completing his Ph.D. in 1948.

His graduate studies were interrupted by WWII and service in the U.S. Navy under the command of Admiral W. F. "Bull" Halsey, Jr., from 1942 to 1946, that took him to Noumea, New Caledonia, a then top-secret location, where he provided educational instruction to United States Navy sailors during their downtime while their ships were being repaired. Not surprisingly, he relished the botanical diversity of that archipelago, especially the orchids and other tropical forest flora. During the later stages of the war, at the request of Admiral Francis X. McInerney, First Lieutenant Lenz became his assistant in charge of inspecting similar education programs in naval training schools along the U.S. West Coast from San Diego, California, to Washington State, which honed his administrative skills and acquainted him with California where he would soon settle.

After the war, Lee resumed his graduate studies at Washington University, devoting his doctoral studies to the comparative histology of maize cobs and contributing to the field of hybrid maize breeding and genetics. During this time, Lee was part of a project team funded by the Rockefeller Foundation involving extensive travel throughout Mexico to sample maize landraces with a view to breeding more productive hybrid corn. The experience led to Lee's lifelong interest in the flora of Mexico.

After completing his Ph.D., Lee was appointed Assistant Botanist on the staff of RSABG and came to the Garden while it was still located in Santa Ana Canyon near Yorba Linda in Orange County, California. He continued on staff when the Garden moved to its current location in Claremont, some 50 miles due north of the ranch, in 1952.

Following a brief stint as Staff Scientist, Lee became Assistant Director, but first was granted a seven-month hiatus to become acquainted with botanical and horticultural institutions in Europe and Russia. Lee succeeded Philip Munz as Director in 1960. He held this position until retirement in 1983. During that time, Lee was actively involved in research, writing articles and authoring books, alongside his directorial duties. He wrote regular and detailed "Director's Reports" for *Aliso*, covering such disparate topics as listing the destination of shipments of seeds and cuttings sent to institutions worldwide or deploring vandals who had defaced plant identification labels on the grounds that were later retrieved from the pond. He also published scientific articles in *Aliso* (Table 1) and elsewhere and authored numerous books, including *Native Plants for California Gardens* (1956), *California Native Trees & Shrubs* (1982), the biography *Marcus E. Jones: Western Geologist, Mining Engineer, and Botanist* (1986) and *An Annotated Catalog of Plants of the Cape Region, Baja California Sur, Mexico* (1992).

While at the Garden, Lee was active in breeding horticultural forms from California native plants through hybridization. Among many other activities, he did definitive work on Pacific Coast *Iris* for which he received the prestigious Foster Plaque from the British Iris Society in 1969. Notably, Lee is credited with developing the first red-flowered iris within the Pacific Coast hybrids, his 'Claremont Indian' (*I. innominata* and probably *I. douglasiana*). The many hybrid irises that grace the grounds at the Garden today attest to his work. The striking x*Chiranthofremontia lenzii*, a hybrid between the Mexican monkey hand tree (*Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*) and native Californian *Fremontodendron* (cultivar 'Pacific Sunset') is another example of his handiwork. The cross was made by graduate student Austin Griffiths and later described by RSABG alumnus Jim Henrickson to honor Lee. The unusual, sprawling tree/shrub has large, morphologically distinctive flowers.

Among his contributions to plant systematics are some fifteen papers on *Iris*, including a taxonomic revision of the Pacific Coast irises where he described two new California subspecies, and descriptions of five new monocot taxa from Mexico, including two in *Dandya* (Asparagaceae) and one each in *Dichelostemma* (Asparagaceae), *Hechtia* (Bromeliaceae), and *Triteleia* (Asparagaceae). In later years, he revisited Asparagaceae, especially *Yucca*, describing *Y. capensis* from Mexico. He also advocated recognition of *Y. jaegeriana* as distinct from the Joshua tree, *Y. brevifolia*.

In retirement, Lee continued to focus on many of his botanical interests, primarily *Iris* and *Yucca*, but also devoted himself to contemporary art and public sculpture. His legacy to the Garden encompasses eight significant sculptures, including Kristan Marvell's *Silent Sentinel* and *Open Vessel* (the latter added well past his 100th birthday), Richard Gregory's *Contemplations*, Khang Pham-New's *Escutcheon*, and Bruce Beasley's *Intersections II*. In addition, Lee donated two prized volumes on Mexican indigenous papers and paper sculptures to the Garden Research Library.

As a quiet and unassuming person, some of Lee's manifold botanical achievements and their significance are only now starting to come to light and will undoubtedly continue to do so into the future.

The Editor

[1]McDade, L., C. Wilson and T. Columbus. In press. In memoriam: Lee W. Lenz (1915–2019). *Plant Science Bulletin*.

[2]Recently renamed California Botanic Garden.

Table 1. Articles and Director's Reports authored by Lee W. Lenz in *Aliso*.

Title	Volume (issue)	Year
Notes on the horticultural history of California irises	2(2): 147–150	1950
Chromosome numbers of some Western American plants, I.	2(3): 317–318	1950
A new garden hybrid in *Ceanothus*	3(1): 51–53	1954
An interspecific hybrid in *Fremontia*	3(1): 55–56	1954
The endosperm as a barrier to intersectional hybridization in *Iris*	3(1): 57–58	1954
Studies in *Iris* embryo culture. I. Germination of embryos of the subsection *Hexapogon* Benth. (sect. *Regelia* sensu Dykes)	3(2): 173–182	1955
Development of the embryo sac, endosperm and embryo in *Iris munzii* and the hybrid *I. munzii* × *I. sibirica* 'Caesar's Brother'	3(3): 329–343	1956
Two new and unusual *Iris* hybrids	3(3): 345–349	1956
A revision of the Pacific Coast irises	4(1): 1–72	1958
Hybridization and speciation in the Pacific Coast irises	4(2): 237–309	1959
Iris tenuis S. Wats., a new transfer to the subsection *Evansia*	4(2): 311–319	1959
A key character in *Iris* for separating the *Sibiricae* and the *Californicae*	5(2): 211–214	1962
The chromosomes of the *Spuria* irises and the evolution of the garden forms*	5(3): 257–272	1963
The Director's Report	6(1): 115–132	1965
Chromosome numbers in the Allieae (Liliaceae)	6(2): 81–82	1966
The Director's Report	6(2): 83–100	1966
The Director's Report	6(3): 161–178	1967
The Director's Report	6(4): 67–84	1968
The Director's Report	7(1): 127–144	1969
A new species of *Triteleia* (Liliaceae) from Guadalupe Island	7(2): 145–148	1970
Triteleia tubergenii, an amphidiploid of garden origin	7(2): 157–160	1970
The Director's Report	7(2): 289–308	1970
Experimental evidence for hybrid origin of *Dichelostemma venustum* (Liliaceae)	7(3): 309–312	1971
Two new species of *Dandya* (Liliaceae) from Mexico and a reexamination of *Bessera* and *Behria*	7(3): 313–320	1971
Chromosome numbers in the genus *Milla* Cav.: (Liliaceae)	7(3): 321–324	1971
The Director's Report	7(3): 385–400	1971
The status of *Pardanthopsis* (Iridaceae)	7(4): 401–403	1972
An intergeneric hybrid between *Belamcanda chinensis* and *Pardanthopsis dichotoma* (= *Iris dichotoma*)	7(4): 405–407	1972
The Director's Report	7(4): 539–556	1972
Percy C. Everett (1902–1973)	8(2): 111–112	1974
A new species of *Dichelostemma* (Liliaceae) from California	8(2): 129–131	1974
A biosystematic study of *Triteleia* (Liliaceae). I. Revision of the species of section *Calliprora*	8(3): 221–258	1975
The chromosomes of *Bloomeria* and *Muilla* (Liliaceae) and range extensions for *Muilla coronata* and *M. transmontana*	8(3): 259–262	1975
A biosystematic study of *Triteleia* (Liliaceae). II. Chromosome numbers and karyotypes of the species of section *Calliprora*	8(4): 353–377	1976
A reclassification of the Siberian irises	8(4): 379–381	1976
The nature of the floral appendages in four species of *Dichelostemma* (Liliaceae)	8(4): 383–389	1976
Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden—The first fifty years	9(1): 1–156	1977
The thorny rose affair: discovery and naming of *Rosa minutifolia*	10(2): 187–217	1982
Plants of the Tres Marias Islands, Nayarit, Mexico	14(1): 19–34	1994 [1995]
A new species of *Hechtia* (Bromeliaceae, Pitcairnoideae) from the Cape Region, Baja California Sur, Mexico	14(1): 59–61	1994 [1995]
A new combination in the Cactaceae of Baja California, Mexico	14(1): 63	1994 [1995]
Typification and change in status of *Yucca schottii* (Agavaceae)**	19(1): 93–98	2000
Yuccas (Agavaceae) of the international four corners: southwestern USA and northwestern Mexico**	19(2): 165–179	2000 [2001]
Seed dispersal in *Yucca brevifolia* (Agavaceae)—present and past, with consideration of the future of the species	20(2): 61–74	2001 [2003]
Reassessment of *Yucca brevifolia* and the recognition of *Y. jaegeriana* as a distinct species	24: 97–104	2007

* co-authored with Alva Day.
** co-authored with Michael A. Hanson.

Fig. 1–7. Lee W. Lenz (1915–2019).—1. Excerpt from the *American Iris Society Bulletin* **198**: 17 (1970), announcing Lee's receipt of the Foster Plaque by the British Iris Society in 1969.—2. Lee with his predecessor, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (RSABG) Director Emeritus Philip Munz (1967; source: *Aliso* **9**: 103 [1977]).—3. Four hues of hybrid *Iris* gracing in the grounds of RSABG in 2019 (photos by Deb Woo).—4. Group photo of RSABG staff taken in 1957 (Lee in front row, third from left; source: *Aliso* **9**: 133 [1977]).—5. Photo of Lee with lupines (undated).—6. A yucca with white and red tepals photographed by Lee in 2015 in the experimental garden at RSABG.—7. Lee opening the exhibition of Mexican indigenous paper pieces at RSABG in March 2015, which he later donated to the Library's Special Collections.