

NPSO Fellows

In 1998 Veva Stansell brought the idea to Native Plant Society of Oregon Board to honor individuals for outstanding service to the society. The Board voted to recognize Fellows of our Society, an accolade used by the California Native Plant Society. Since 1998 we have honored eighteen individuals with this, our highest award: John Robotham, Keith Chamberlain, and Ruth Hanson in 1998, Kenton Chambers and Wilbur Bluhm in 1999, Karl Urban and Frank Lang in 2000, Charlene Simpson, Veva Stansell and Rhoda Love in 2001, Jerry Igo in 2002, and Charlene Holzwarth and Russ Jolley in 2003. This year, 2007, five outstanding women received Fellows awards: Barbara Robinson, Joan Fosback, Mildred Thiele, Lois Hopkins and Mary Carlson.

Prospective Fellows may be nominated by individual NPSO members, by chapters, or by the State Board. Fellows must have contributed outstanding service to NPSO or to the cause of plant conservation in Oregon. The nomination is brought to the NPSO State Board for approval, and the recipient is then honored at the next Annual Meeting, presented with a handsome plaque, and featured in an article in *Kalmiopsis*. Fellows also receive a Life Membership in NPSO. —*Rhoda Love, NPSO Fellows Committee.*

Barbara Robinson

When Barbara Robinson first saw the oak/pine area of the Columbia Gorge, she knew she had found home. Born in Chicago, Illinois, Barbara came west to attend Reed College in Portland, finishing a joint major in psychology and philosophy in 1970. In 1972 she completed a MS in psychobiology from the University of California, Irvine. She taught psychology at Portland Community College for thirty years and retired in 2001. She also taught introductory biology and psychology at Columbia Gorge Community College in The Dalles.

Fruits of Barbara's inexhaustible passion for conserving her beloved Gorge began with creation of the Tom McCall Preserve. In 1978, after four years of effort, she purchased and sold to the Nature Conservancy the first parcel of land (34 acres). In 1985 she raised the funds to buy a third parcel (64 acres) that included McCall Point. With the Mazamas, she helped lay out and build a trail there.

In 1986 she worked to get the Rowena Special Management Area included in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Act. This allowed further land purchases with federal money of the Memaloose and the Seven Mile Hill areas. She planted native plants at the Mosier interchange, and was one of many who helped Russ Jolley plant and weed at milepost 68 on Interstate 84. Later she and Russ convinced the Forest Service to buy the property that later became the Memaloose Trail.

On the Washington side of the Gorge, she lobbied the Forest Service to purchase property east of Coyote Wall, where Keith Chamberlain (NPSO fellow in 1998) led many NPSO spring wildflower hikes. In 1988 Barbara was the catalyst for Nancy Russell's first purchase of land for conservation in the Memaloose area; many other purchases followed. Barbara then spent several years convincing the Forest Service to buy land in the Rowena Dell, a magnificent canyon next to the Rowena Plateau. She also



Barbara Robinson. Photo by Kareem Sturgeon, 2006.

wrote many letters to many private landowners calling attention to the beauty and scenic value of their properties, leading to sale of property to the Forest Service for conservation. Next, she joined three others to conduct a rare plant survey for the Klickitat River, which had been designated Wild and Scenic. Her initial interest in the Klickitat River area near Lyle, Washington, led to involvement in the 31-mile Rails-to-Trails conversion for biking and hiking in 2002. At that time there was a possibility that Washington State Parks would cede the public land to private ownership. Both State Parks and the Forest Service now share management, but the County still opposes the trail. She is currently vice president of the Klickitat Trail Conservancy, the group dedicated to preserving and enhancing natural values along the trail, including botanical qualities. Every week brings a new crisis or frustration, but the group has achieved a functional trail. Other conservation efforts have included the Chenoweth Trail and the Seven Mile Hill Trail near The Dalles, Oregon. She is still trying to negotiate land purchases in that area.

Over the years, Barbara has led many hikes for NPSO, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Columbia Gorge Community College and Elderhostel. She now resides in Mosier, where she has contributed thousands and thousands of hours toward conservation and restoration of native plants and habitats. Her love of the Gorge has truly made a difference for future generations.

—*Leslie R. Labbe, Portland Chapter.*

**Douglas County's Little Old Ladies in Hiking Boots:
Lois Wesley Hopkins, Mildred Thiele,
Joan Fosback, and Mary Carlson**

This is the story of four Douglas County women, self-proclaimed "Little Old Ladies in Hiking Boots," whose passion for native plants placed their county at the forefront of the Oregon Flora Project. The four women, Lois Wesley Hopkins, Mildred Thiele, Joan Fosback, and Mary Carlson, founded the herbarium at the Douglas County Museum of History and Natural History, without any formal education in botany. In 1994, the US Department of Agriculture presented the four with a certificate "in recognition and appreciation for the outstanding commitment and dedication to the identification of the flora of Douglas County." After decades of devoted volunteer work, the four women knew Douglas County plants better than else anyone did. During this time, they focused their energies on finding every plant that grew in the county. Collectively, they filled the herbarium in the Douglas County Museum with pressed specimens of more than 3,000 plants.

Their great partnership started in the early 1960s over an orchid. Lois Wesley Hopkins, a first grade teacher, learned that Mildred Thiele, a second grade teacher, thought a coral root was a member of the heath family. Lois knew a little bit about botany at that time, and had recently taken a class in natural history just to have something extra to share with her students. Also, in 1960, the late George Abdill, former director of the Douglas County Museum talked Lois into working on a herbarium project for the museum. Lois remembered his request was simple,—he wanted a sample of every plant that grew in Douglas County.

When Lois began the herbarium project she knew she had to have help. After letting Mildred know that the coral root was in the orchid family, she asked Mildred if she'd care to join her in the herbarium project. It was then they discovered a mutual interest in a new-found love of wildflower identification. "I was already doing art work in watercolors and illustrating the plants seemed like something I'd enjoy," Mildred said. "I grew up in Tyee and marveled at the many wild plants in the woods, but I never got into the scientific part until I got together with Lois."

When Lois and Mildred met Joan Fosback at the Glide Wildflower Show in 1967, they became a team of three. Joan became interested in botany as a child in Medford. Her mother and maternal grandmother were crazy about gardening and Joan took a great interest in plants and being outdoors. She and her husband Ollie moved to Roseburg in 1947. Ollie gave her a simple wildflower book, which led to a lifetime of learning about plants, including volunteering at the Glide Wildflower Show.

The three ladies immersed themselves in the wild, week-long frenzy of plant gathering that precedes the show each year. They scoured hillsides, forests, meadows, cliffs, and shores to find plants to take back to the show and carefully identify. Fortified with the ladies' extra energy, the Glide Wildflower Show grew from a very modest collection of locally collected plants to an extravaganza of hundreds of correctly identified plants all neatly arranged by family. As Joan became more and more interested in native plants, she acquired a microscope, a set of botany textbooks, and a plant press. She was seldom seen without a flora and plant press during family vacations, on summer botany surveys with Mildred and Lois, and collecting for the Glide Wildflower Show.

In 1977 the "Little Old Ladies in Hiking Boots" crew was delighted with a new challenge: the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) contracted with them to compile a *Para-Botanist Training Package*. This comprehensive report became the first botanical report of the BLM Roseburg District. The group continued to develop a Douglas County plant checklist indicating which plants might be considered "threatened or endangered."

Mary Carlson moved to Roseburg in 1979 and met the three other ladies in 1982. She was a city girl, born in San Francisco, with a keen sense of adventure. She and her twin sister climbed Mt. Rainier when they were 12 years old (setting a record for youngest climbers at the time). She earned a private pilot's license while studying for a degree in microbiology at Stanford University. "I knew nothing about plants," she said. "In my freshman year at college, I took botany, but I have learned everything I know from this group."



Left to right: Mildred Thiele, Lois Hopkins, Mary Carlson, and Joan Fosback. Photo by Amiran White, courtesy of The News-Review, Roseburg.

In 1980, the group was invited to house their private botanical collection at the Douglas County museum and to establish a scientific herbarium. The Friends of the Museum generously supplied cabinets, dissecting microscopes, scientific books and various supplies. Dr. David Wagner and Dr. Kenneth Chambers gave valuable suggestions to the three ladies. Collecting and mounting plant specimens moved them to the next level. Soon they needed a more workable system for recording plant lists and accessions to the herbarium. Mary's contributions to the group included her knowledge of Latin and computer skills. In the summer of 1987, Lois Hopkins asked Mary to baby-sit her computer and by summer's end, Mary had entered all the collections in a computerized plant database!

In 1993, they completed a 53-page book documenting their collections, sorted by family, from Aceraceae to Zygophyllaceae—plants from every nook and cranny of the county. They admitted they hadn't yet found all of the plant taxa growing in Douglas County, but they certainly hadn't given up searching. In 1997, the group, still actively botanizing, found western wahoo (*Euonymus occidentalis*), a common shrub in California but not previously recorded in Douglas County.

Although the four modestly described themselves as the “Little Old Ladies in Hiking Boots,” it would be a mistake to underestimate their audacity and tenacity. They didn't sit around waiting for others bring plants in for identification. As hands-on researchers who combed every corner of the county looking for plant specimens, they had more than a few stories to tell about their wild adventures.

Mildred said she once fell into a “real pothole” while walking in the woods in search of plants. The hole was the leavings of a marijuana grower who had been growing his illicit plants in a large bucket. “We figure the grower must have pulled up the bucket and left the hole,” she said. Mary said once she was so busy looking at a plant she walked right off a cliff. Lois ventured out on some mossy ground, only to find herself up to her neck in a bog. “I can't tell you how many tires we've changed,” Mildred said, and noted that her husband was not too happy about her ruining a dual muffler on her car during a single outing (punctured by two separate rocks in the road). A variety of challenges were overcome: what to do when a tree fell across the road, trapping them at the dead-end; how to break the car window after locking the keys inside; or getting lost (who moved that creek because it was not there on the map?). They also remembered driving through an open gate in a mountainous area and upon returning, found the gate closed and locked. On another adventure, they almost got stuck on a narrow logging road miles from civilization in a sudden snow storm.

All four admitted to botanizing whenever and wherever they traveled. “You just can't help yourself,” Joan said. The four met every Tuesday to process and identify their plant specimens. In the winter, they mounted and labeled the pressed plants and wrote the history of the finds made during spring, summer, and fall field work. In 1995, they published a book, *Flora Distribution Survey for Douglas County*, based on their field work from 1978 to 1993. When their work was incorporated into the Oregon Atlas Project (Oregon Flora Project), it became apparent that their contributions put Douglas County far ahead of other counties in cataloging the native flora.

In the late 1990s, the four admitted that age was a problem. Because they knew that someone had to eventually take over their work, they openly sought new recruits interested in “making a lasting worthwhile contribution to the botanical study of Douglas County.”

Lois Wesley Hopkins, who turned a coral root question into a lifetime of botanical adventures, died on December 6, 2005, at the age of 94. The Glide Wildflower Show and the Douglas County Museum were very important parts of her life. Mildred Thiele was 91 when she died September 10, 2006. She was “still going strong” at the age of 90 when she donated nearly 5,000 color slides to OSU for the Oregon Flora Project. She had carried two cameras on her field excursions since 1982 and presented programs of her wildflower adventures to many organizations. In addition, she was an outstanding artist and especially proficient in watercolors. Mary Carlson so loved identifying plants that she could still identify most of them by touch after she lost her vision. She died on March 3, 2007 at the age of 86. Joan Fosback, now approaching 80, was unable to attend the 2007 NPSO annual meeting in Mosier. Members of the Umpqua Chapter will present the award to her in her home in Roseburg.—*Sam Friedman, Umpqua Chapter*, adapted from the Oregon Flora Newsletter and a News Review article by Bill Duncan.