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History of the University of Oregon Herbarium (1903-1993)

By DAVID H. WAGNER

Introduction

A herbarium is one of the fundamental resources of traditional botany. Its collections, library, and staff provide a wide range of services to science and society. Most universities older than a hundred years have, or have had, a herbarium because botany was a core science at the time these universities were founded. Just like universities, herbaria have definite founding dates and occasionally dates of closure. This is the story of one of the major west coast herbaria, from beginning to end. Although a herbarium is an institution, the critical elements of the story necessarily concern the people who built and cared for its collections.

Establishment

The University of Oregon Herbarium (known as ORE in the international directory of herbaria) was established in 1903, by Albert Raddin Sweetser (1861-1940). He was a Professor of Botany since 1902 and served as head of the Department of Botany from 1909 until his retirement in 1931. Although he was not an important collector himself, he was very interested in the history of plant exploration. Soon after his arrival in Oregon he made the acquaintance of the resident pioneer botanists of Portland. His first major accomplishment, in 1903, was to secure the donation of the personal collection of Thomas Jefferson Howell (1842-1912). Howell's herbarium consisted of approximately 10,000 sheets. It included

nearly 300 type specimens of plants Howell had discovered, as well as duplicates obtained in exchange from other early botanists. At that time it was considered the largest and finest herbarium at any public institution in the northwest. Howell was hired for the 1903-1904 school year to organize the collection.



Albert R. Sweetser

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The Core of the Collection: The Big Six of Oregon

Howell was Oregon's premier resident plant explorer, a self-taught botanist who discovered more new species of plants in the state than any other. He began collecting in the mid-1870's with his older brother, Joseph. They sent their novelties to Asa Gray at Harvard University, who published formal descriptions. He named the genus *Howellia* to honor

both brothers. Joseph Howell soon quit botany to work his farm, while Thomas, encouraged by Gray, attempted to make a living as a plant collector. Most major herbaria in the United States harbor at least a few of Howell's specimens, either obtained directly or through bequests of collectors who purchased from him. Because commercial collectors had a good market in Europe, Thomas Howell's specimens are found in many Old World herbaria (most of those in Berlin were probably destroyed by Allied bombing during WWII). He worked all over the state (and also went to



Thomas Jefferson Howell

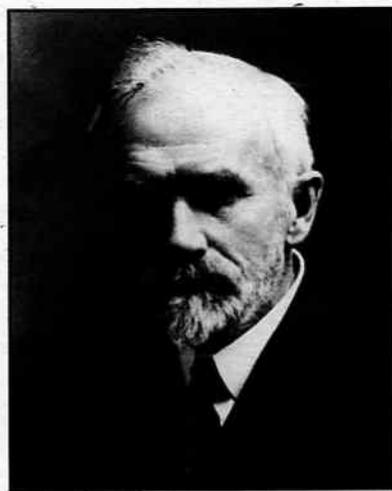
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Alaska), making the greatest number of his discoveries in the southwestern corner of Oregon. New species brought better prices, so Gray's prompt attention to Oregon collections was extremely important. After Asa Gray died in 1888, Howell, despite only six months' formal schooling, began to publish his own descriptions of new plants. Soon he began to write the first book on the plants of the Pacific Northwest, *A Flora of Northwest America*. It appeared in seven fascicles, the first in March 1987, and the last in August 1903. Upon completion of this work Howell was exhausted and ready to turn over his material to the state university (now known as the University of Oregon).

The next important landmark in the growth of ORE was the purchase of the personal herbarium of William C. Cusick (1842-1922). Cusick worked primarily in eastern Oregon, most notably the Blue Mountains, Wallowa Mountains and Steens Mountain. Although most biographical references give the date of this acquisition as 1913, the 1911 minutes of the Board of Regents note, "a collection of 10,000 sheets was purchased from William C. Cusick." Record of the purchase price and precise delivery date are apparently not preserved in university archives. Cusick, like Howell, was a self-trained frontier botanist cultivated by Asa Gray. Cusick also gathered specimens for sale, resulting in wide distribution of his specimens. European botanists used Cusick's specimens to describe many new names for Pacific Northwest plants. Since the specimens upon which these names are based are housed abroad, the duplicates in Cusick's personal collection are especially valuable. You can examine these locally to get a good sense of what the European botanists had in mind without having to go to the expense and trouble of an international loan. And, as with Howell's herbarium, Cusick's collection contained many valuable sheets he had obtained by

exchange including not only those from the better known west coast botanists but also southwestern collections from the likes of H. Rusby and C. Pringle. Most of Cusick's early field notebooks were included in the acquisition and have proven to be an invaluable resource for modern botanists attempting to relocate the rare plants he discovered (in contrast to Howell, who kept poor records; what little remained at his death is rumored to have been destroyed by his grieving wife).

In 1924 the University of Oregon obtained the curatorial services of Louis F. Henderson (1853-1942). Sweetser had acted as curator until then. Sweetser was very broadly trained as a botanist but had very little experience with taxonomy (naming, describing, and classifying plants). He was fascinated by the people who could recognize and give formal Latin names to plants. Henderson



Louis F. Henderson, Eugene 1920

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was a rare breed. He was a man of scholarly credentials who plunged into the frontier as an explorer. Sweetser's greatest contribution to ORE was to bring in Henderson to care for the herbarium. Henderson's thoughtful curatorial abilities created one of the richest and most useful collections of north-west plants.

Henderson came to Portland, Oregon in the early 1880's to teach at and eventually become principal of the Portland High School. In Portland he befriended Thomas Howell. They went on several important collecting expeditions together. Henderson describes these adventures, and many more, in his compelling autobiography (1934?-date uncertain; manuscript on file in the University of Oregon Library's Special Collections!). He was well-educated (M.A. in Romance Languages from Cornell, 1874) including good classes in botany. Harships in early life² gave him the fortitude to strike out into the wilderness with the fearlessness and self-reliance of a frontiersman. He became the first Professor of Botany at the University of Idaho (herbarium acronym ID), from 1893-1909. That period was marked by the tragic loss of his entire herbarium in a fire in 1906. William H. Baker, one of Henderson's successors at ID, said that 85,000 sheets were consumed (conservation notes, DHW & WHB, 7 Jan 1981).

Henderson's tenure as the first truly professional curator of ORE lasted until 1939. This was a period of rapid growth of the herbarium. Without teaching or other administrative work, Henderson maintained an active collecting program,

¹ Otherwise unpublished, it was serialized in the NPSO Bulletin sometime during the years 1979-1982.

² See Henderson's manuscript "Memories of My Boyhood; Especially Those Related to the Civil War and Reconstruction in the Old South." 1936+; on file in UO Special Collections.

mounting and arranging in the winters. He encouraged, with occasional personal support, student collectors such as Lincoln Constance (1909-) and Roy C. Andrews (1888-1955), and university instructor LeRoy Detling (see below). Most important by far, however, was securing the donation of personal collections of other prominent Northwest botanists. The most significant among these were J.B. Leiber, M.W. Gorman, and E.P. Sheldon.



Left to right: LeRoy Detling, Louis F. Henderson, Willis Jepson, Marion Owenby; Seattle, Wa., June 1940.

John Bernhard Leiber (1853-1913) worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture most of his botanical career, so the first set of his collections are in the National Herbarium (US). The existence of his personal herbarium (particularly the duplication of that at US) is not widely known. It encompasses a large amount of material: his earliest collections from Iowa (1860's!), those he made with Sandberg, Coville, et al. in Washington and Idaho, his California expeditions, and numerous exchange specimens including ones from Howell, Gorman, and Henderson. Perhaps most significant among the latter are Idaho specimens that Henderson had sent to Leiber when both were working in Idaho at the same time. The isotypes of Henderson's Idaho novelties in the Leiber herbarium are good candidates for lectotypes of the Henderson holotypes lost in the ID fire of 1906 (only a nomenclaturist will truly relish this situation). Associated with the specimens is Leiber's personal California notebook, annotated emphatically, "not the property of the USDA!" University records note his collection was received in 1911, but other details of the acquisition of Leiber's herbarium are not known and have not been researched. He died in Leaburg, on the McKenzie River east of Eugene, over ten years before the start of Henderson's tenure, but it is obvious from annotations that Henderson organized and incorporated the Leiber material into the collections at ORE.

Martin Woodcock Gorman (1853-1926) was an amateur botanist and gentleman scientist who soon fell in with Howell and Henderson in Portland. He arrived in 1885 to work as an accountant in family businesses. He became one of Howell's sincerest admirers and supporters. Howell's visit to Alaska was arranged by Gorman, who regularly spent summers in Alaska to keep books for his family's canneries. Although Gorman

was a well-known and prolific collector of plants (Oregon, Alaska and Washington), independently discovering twenty or more new species, perhaps his most significant contribution to botany was proofreading and editing Howell's *A Flora of Northwest America*. Without Gorman's meticulous attention, Howell's work would have seemed crude and amateurish, riddled with grammatical errors and misspellings. Although Gorman was assiduous in sending a first set of duplicates to the National Herbarium, he is not well known outside the region because he did not collect for sale. He did, however, vigorously exchange specimens and correspondence with the contemporary local botanists. His voluminous papers and journals are housed in the Special Collections of the University of Oregon Library, waiting to be mined for their meteorological, ethnographical and other natural history observations (cf. Gorman, 1896, *Pittonia* 3(14): 64-85). Again, Henderson was responsible for annotating and incorporating Gorman's mounted sheets into the general collection. However, he merely filed away Gorman's unmounted material, original or not, among his own folders of unmounted duplicates.

Edmund Perry Sheldon (1869-1913 [1917?]) was another of the Portland botanists, friend of Martin Gorman and Louis Henderson. He collected extensively in the Portland area, the Oregon Cascades, the coast, and the Columbia River Gorge. How his collections came to ORE is not known, but it's possible they arrived with those of Gorman, a close friend. Notebooks for the years 1902-1903 are present at ORE; they include a diary of an expedition to the Three Sisters region with Gorman and others. W.H. Baker recalled Henderson talking about Sheldon visiting him for breakfast at his orchard in Hood River, apparently one of the last times Sheldon was seen alive. Sheldon's end is unknown; Bill Baker relates that the most widely held view was that Sheldon disappeared mysteriously into the deserts of Nevada (conversation notes, DHW & WHB, 7 Jan 1981).

Other Early Collections

Among the sheets of the six resident pioneer botanists (Howell, Cusick, Henderson, Leiber, Gorman, and Sheldon) whose herbaria form the core of ORE are specimens from most of the prominent collectors of the west. The most significant can be identified by the number of their specimens found in the type collection at ORE. Wilhelm N. Suksdorf (1850-1932) is represented by over a hundred type specimens. Because he exchanged specimens with most of the Oregon botanists mentioned above, it is no surprise that ORE has such a rich trove of specimens from this most prolific of Northwest collectors. Other botanists from this era represented by a dozen or more type specimens at ORE are A.D.E. Elmer, A.A. Heller, M.E. Jones, A. Nelson, C.V. Piper, and C.G. Pringle. Somewhat fewer than a dozen type specimens came from E.L. Greene and S.B. Parish.

Although no types are included among their specimens, the bryophyte herbarium was established with the acquisition of moss collections from A.S. Foster (1871-1922?; not Adriance Sherwood Foster, 1901-1973, plant morphologist and anatomist at Berkeley) and M.A. Flinn (1841-1924), who practiced medicine in Vancouver, Washington, just after the turn of the

century. It seems likely that these collections arrived with Gorman's herbarium some time after 1926. Henderson collected a large number of bryophytes between 1930 and 1935 (a few from the 1880's) but he never mastered these plants. His collections, though numerous, are rather mundane. A set of specimens from F.A. MacFadden (1888-1964), mostly from Washington and SW Canada, was presumably obtained about this time.

The lichen and fungus collections were established by Sweetser, another of his significant contribution to the herbarium. He collected few vascular plants. He prepared at least one lichen exsiccata (a reference set of predetermined lot size and fixed number of duplicates) and purchased or received in exchange several early exsiccatae. A.S. Foster collected lichens as well as mosses. Included in the lichen (and bryophyte) collections are a few specimens from nearly all the early botanists, but none are rarities. (Leiberg made significant collections of mosses but very few of these are at ORE).

Official Curator's Position Begins In 1936

In 1936 a Museum of Natural History was created at the University of Oregon by the State Board of Higher Education, with the Herbarium as one of the four units (the others being the Condon Museum of Geology, Museum of Zoology, and Oregon State Museum of Anthropology). This was an organizational strategy prompted by Luther S. Cressman, curator of the anthropology collections and new director of the unified museum. It helped to keep these collections at the University of Oregon during the Great Depression, when the state legislature was attempting to consolidate humanities at the University of Oregon and sciences at Oregon State University.

Although Henderson was formally designated curator of the herbarium at this time, his health (particularly his eyesight) was failing, and assistance was needed. LeRoy Detling (1898-1967) was hired to help on a part-time basis. Detling had been an instructor of Romance Languages at the university and was inspired by Henderson to study botany at Stanford (M.A., 1933; Ph.D., 1936).

Detling assumed full duties as curator when Henderson retired in 1939 at the age of 86. During the thirty years Detling worked at ORE the most significant additions to the herbarium were Detling's own collections, numbering almost 10,000, and exchanges based on them. Of note are the specimens on which were based his monographs on *Cardamine* (*Dentaria*), *Descurainia*, and *Lupinus*. He became as much an ecologist as taxonomist, focusing on biogeography in his later



LeRoy Detling

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years. The meticulous, detailed ecological data on his specimen labels are much admired. He collected in all of the far West, though mainly in Oregon, and went to Mexico several times to collect and pursue his studies of the origin of the western flora (published posthumously as *Historical Background of the Flora of the Pacific Northwest* and still available from the UO Museum of Natural History).

Detling was curator until his sudden death in late 1967. The herbarium was cared for by his wife, Mildred R. Detling (1915-), until a new curator could be found. As a part of the search process Arthur R. Kruckeberg of the University of Washington was invited to visit the herbarium and prepare a report assessing the status and needs of the herbarium. His report, presented in March 1968, outlined the strengths of the herbarium and gave suggestions to encourage the herbarium to prosper.

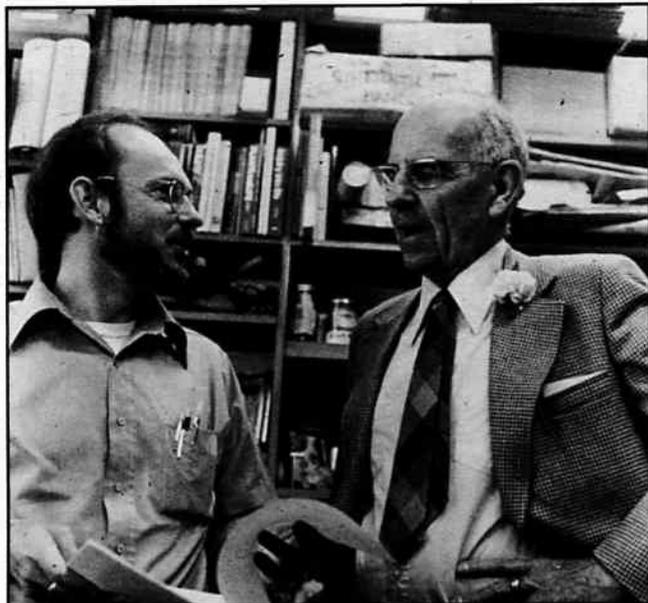
In 1969 Georgie Mason (1910-) accepted the post of acting curator. She continued with this "acting" title until her retirement seven years later. Previously Mason had worked at Oregon State University, where she had obtained her M.S. in 1960. She had been working on plants of the Willowa Mountains for some time, and carried out annual collecting trips to that area until the 1975 publication of *Guide to the Plants of the Willowa Mountains of Northeastern Oregon*. In addition to the Willowa Mountain plants, Mason enriched the herbarium with a concerted effort to document two groups of plants, adventives and aquatics, that had been all but ignored by previous botanists at ORE.

In 1963 the collection of Oregon's best known woman plant explorer, Lilla I. Leach (1886-1980), was donated to the University of Oregon. The approximately 3,000 specimens were mostly unmounted, usually with only sparse collecting notes on the folders. It fell to Mason to prepare labels, mount and accession the collection, and distribute duplicates. The Leach collection is especially valued because she and her husband, John R. (1882-1972) spent so much time collecting in southwestern Oregon, a floristically rich and still underexplored region. Lilla Leach is best known for the discovery of *Kalmiopsis leachiana*, a species named by Henderson in 1931 and established as a monotypic genus by Rehder in 1932. In all, fourteen plant names are based on her finds. She claimed priority in the discovery of two others species which, however, were described from collections of other botanists.

In 1974 Mason incorporated the collection of Orlin I. Ireland (1895-1973) into the herbarium. An avid amateur botanist, for many years Ireland had worked one evening each week in the herbarium. He collected at sites as far afield as Alberta and Nevada, but showed special interest in plants of the central Oregon Cascades. With Detling's guidance, Ireland's *Plants of the Three Sisters Region* was published in 1968 as Bulletin 12 of the UO Museum of Natural History. Between 1934 and 1970, when he ceased collecting, he had reached over 3,800 collections. As with the Leach collection, the specimens were mostly unmounted but in this case carefully kept notebooks made label-typing fairly straightforward.

Georgia Mason's curatorial work included two activities which substantially improved the collections. With the support of the Museum, a sufficient number of new herbarium cases were

obtained to reorganize and spread out the collections so that there was room for insertion of new material at the top and bottom of each case. This involved replacing almost all of the genus and species covers (folders), which by this time were so brittle they were little more than sheets of manila separating the species. She also began formally accessioning the specimens, stamping each with an identification indicium and a unique number (as recommended in Kruckeberg's 1968 report).



FROM OOO HERBARIUM FILES NOW AT OSU, CORVALLIS

David Wagner, left, with L. Constance, Fall 1980.

Upon Mason's retirement in 1976, David Wagner (1945-) was appointed as curator. Wagner came to ORE from Washington State University, where he had done his doctoral research under Marion F. Ownbey. The Museum of Natural History was reorganized in 1977-1978, with the Herbarium being transferred to the Biology Department for office support and academic matters while the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences retained direct administrative and budgetary authority. Although the dismembering of the museum diminished interactions among museum staff, it greatly improved the integration of the herbarium with the teaching and research activities of the Biology Department. In 1979 Wagner was designated Director of the Herbarium, and in 1982 promoted to the rank of Associate Professor of Biology.

Wagner continued the numbering and stamping of specimens. Mason had reached almost 40,000. Lichens, mosses, and liverworts were included in the accessioning. Accessioning was completed in January 1979 with number 100,017. Previous estimates of the entire holdings of ORE had ranged from 150,000 (1968) to 200,000 (1976) sheets. (This suggests that most figures for the size of collections, where not based on actual numbers from notebooks or accession records, are probably over-estimates). In addition to simple accessioning, possible type specimens were segregated and duplicates pulled for distribution in exchange. Original publications were consulted to establish or reaffirm the status of each type specimen and an annotated catalog prepared and stored in a computer database. Linda A. Vorobik, herbarium assistant 1978-1982,

was largely responsible for doing the bibliographic work on the type collections catalog. In 1993 there were computerized records for 1,100 specimens in the ORE type catalog.

Much of Wagner's curatorial energy went into dealing with the considerable backlog of unprocessed material. The greatest challenge was curating Henderson's unmounted duplicates, stored for decades in cardboard boxes on the tops of cabinets. The boxes contained, in addition to Henderson's own voluminous material, much original material from Gorman's herbarium. Henderson kept his material in a taxonomic sequence; he would insert later collections into earlier folders of the same species. Gorman's unmounted specimens were also interspersed among Henderson's. This required careful unwrapping of the bundles to sort out individual collections. Labels often needed to be prepared from handwritten notes on the folder margins, supplemented with dates from already-mounted specimens when these could be found in the general collection. After incorporating original material, several thousand specimens were distributed in exchange. Special recognition for meticulous work goes to Kimberly St. Hilaire (herbarium assistant 1983-1984) and Chester A. Wilson (herbarium assistant 1984-1986).

Large personal collections acquired during this period included 791 specimens from southwestern Oregon from C. David White (1940-) in 1976; 897 mostly New York specimens from Sanford S. Tepfer (1910-) in 1977; 1,505 specimens, including several hundred European pteridophytes, but mostly midwestern plants, of J. Frederick Brenckle (1875-1957), donated by his daughter Bea LeFevre in 1979; 750 specimens of the western central Oregon Cascades from James C. Hickman (1941-1993) in 1982; and 607 specimens, documenting Myrtle Island Research Natural Area in Douglas County and Golden and Silver Falls State Park in Coos County, from Ralph L. Thompson (1943-) in 1990-91. Well in excess of 1,600 specimens, mostly from Alaska and the Yukon but also a large number from southwestern Oregon, were donated to the herbarium over the years 1965 through 1982 by Maxcine M. Williams (1911-1983). After identifying the plants, frequently with the aid of Stanley Welsh at Brigham Young University, she mounted and accessioned the specimens herself, coming into the herbarium every winter after her summer's field work.

For the first time since Sweetser, attention was given to the non-vascular plants housed in the herbarium. Although there was a considerable amount of material, none was properly curated or accessible. The best collections were of lichens, as mentioned above. Other than a few miscellaneous collections by botanists mentioned above, the most significant recent acquisition was that of Frank P. Sipe (1887-1975).

Sipe had been a biology faculty member whose personal cryptogamic collections were housed in the herbarium and acquired upon his death. His collections consisted mainly of lichens and fleshy fungi. There being no indication of interest in herbarium work with fungi among the faculty at Eugene, all fungi — both Sipe's and the classical material assembled by Sweetser — were transferred to Oregon State University on permanent loan in 1976. Attention was turned to Sipe's collection of c. 2,000 lichens. The specimens were repacketed, relabeled, and accessioned. Sipe's ample, oversized field packets generated many sets of duplicates. His collections are notable

for having the types of 26 names, mostly described by H.A. Magnusson and V. Gyelnik. Present are valuable exchange specimens from Y. Asakawa, M.P. Tomin, and A.W. Herre. Sipe's collection also included c. 250 mosses and a handful of liverworts.

A most significant addition to the lichen herbarium came in 1978-79 when Lawrence H. Pike (1943-) presented his personal collection and library (books and reprints) to ORE. The collection of over 3,000 specimens came excellently packaged and labeled, and needed only to be accessioned and filed. Other significant original lichen collections have been presented by Daphne F. Stone (1952-) and Sanford S. Tepfer (1910-). S. Shushan, W.A. Weber and C. Wetmore are well represented by exchange material. D.F. Stone, former graduate student and volunteer, deserves much credit for helping to bring the nomenclature and organization of the lichen collections up to date.

The moss collection was also refurbished and reorganized. There are no truly outstanding individual collections present. Henderson's collections are most numerous, but, as mentioned above, relatively mundane: common species collected repeatedly. A significant amount of useful, original material has come from John A. Christy (1952-), L.H. Pike, Charles Edson, and D.H. Wagner. Collections of T.C. Frye, V.J. Krajina, E. Lawton, and R. Spjut are represented by a significant number of specimens received in exchange. In 1993 there were 3,700 mosses. Their excellent state of organization is due especially to volunteer work by D.F. Stone and J.A. Christy.

The liverwort collection has been built up almost entirely by the efforts of Wagner, who took up the group as an area of special interest upon coming to ORE. The case marked "Hepaticae" had only seventeen specimens filed in it in 1976, although a certain amount of uncurated material was stored in various corners of the herbarium. Henderson's material had a fair number of specimens that had been identified by Ethel Sanborn, a biology faculty member at the University from 19?? to 1932. She published *Hepaticae and Anthocerotae of Western Oregon* (the last major publication on this group for the state) in 1929, but the collections upon which this is based were taken with her to Oregon State University when she moved there in 1932.

As part of a project to write a guide to the liverworts of Oregon, Wagner has collected over 3,000 specimens from Oregon with many numbers from Alaska to California to Idaho. These are well-studied collections with critical notes on oil-bodies included. Important duplicate collections of liverworts from L. Clark, C. Edson, T.C. Frye, W.S. Hong, R. Spjut, and S.S. Tepfer have been added.

The Moves Of The Herbarium

The herbarium was originally housed in Deady Hall, the first building on campus. In 1928 it was moved to Friendly Hall, about 1932 moved to Condon Hall, and then moved to the Natural History Building in 1952. The herbarium was moved to a site close to the Willamette River in 1987, its entrance being appropriately located at the corner of Moss Street and Garden Avenue.

The final move was made in 1993. The force behind this move came from three directions. On the one hand, the university desired to use the space where the herbarium was located to develop a research park. At the same time the university was mandated by citizen initiative (known as Measure 5) to make drastic budget cuts. The third major consideration was that for many years the Biology Department at the University had been shifting focus from traditional disciplines to molecular and theoretical approaches. It was decided that the herbarium would be closed. An agreement was reached with Oregon State University to transfer ORE to Corvallis and merge the two universities' herbaria. The transfer was completed in June 1993, marking the end of 90 years of ORE as a distinct entity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to give special thanks to Keith Richard, archivist for the University of Oregon, for endless assistance with historical questions. I have learned much about ORE's past players from conversations with Mildred Detling, Georgia Mason, Kenton Chambers, John Christy, and Lincoln Constance. Rhoda Love, Art Kruckeberg and David Kennedy have read the manuscript and made helpful suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank the many people of our region, botanists and others, who have supplied unwavering encouragement and moral support during the seventeen years of my curatorship.