



IN MEMORIAM

Ray Thomas Collett Jr.
Founding UCSC Arboretum Director
Professor of Natural Sciences
UC Santa Cruz
1932 - 2012

Ray Collett, the founding director of the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, died on Wednesday, February 22. He was 79.

Ray, a professor emeritus of natural history, was a member of UCSC's 1965 founding faculty. As founding director of the Arboretum, he oversaw the conversion of about 130 acres of rough pastures into a leading horticultural site. The Arboretum is renowned for its collections of plants from Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, as well as California natives.

Ray Collett left the campus, the community, and the world a living memorial, not only here in the wonderful collections of the UCSC Arboretum, but also in the many cultivars and selections of plants he introduced to California gardeners.

He is credited with introducing many popular ornamental plants to the nursery industry. These include the 'Swan River' cultivar of the Australian "blue hibiscus" (*Alyogyne huegelii*), the 'Hurricane Point' cultivar of the California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*), numerous *Correa* cultivars from Australia the UCSC Arboretum *Leptospermum* Tasman hybrids, and many others. He received several honors in recognition of his work, including the American Horticultural Society's 1986 Professional Citation, the California Horticultural Society's Annual Award for 1997, and the California Association of Nurserymen 1997 Research Award.

He was also a popular teacher, mentoring students who worked at the Arboretum and teaching courses in art, botany, biogeography, horticulture, and meteorology. He gathered plants for the Arboretum that would be useful for both teaching and research. Among the unusual plants he added to the Arboretum's collection was *Amborella trichopoda*, collected in 1975 from the South Pacific island of New Caledonia by a pair of UCSC students. In 1999, when a genetic analysis identified *Amborella* as the most ancestral living flowering plant, the UCSC Arboretum was the only botanic garden in the United States with living specimens.

Collett earned his B.A. in chemistry and Ph.D. in geography from UC Berkeley. His doctoral dissertation was *Interpretations of California Landscapes*. He worked at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory and the U.S. Weather Bureau before joining the UCSC faculty. He served as Arboretum director from 1965 through 1997.

Ray Collett was a brilliant and hugely influential individual. He was at once, director, professor, mentor, rabble-rouser, prod, and sometimes father figure. He died in the early morning of February 22, 2012, in the Arboretum residence surrounded by his amazing plant collections and a loving Arboretum extended family.

He was lucid and good-natured to the very end, visiting with former students, friends, and colleagues before he gently slipped away.

Some cultures believe that people are alive on this earth until the last of us who knew them in person, is gone. The Arboretum itself is a living witness to Ray's fascination with biogeography and nature's evolutionary experimentation with plants. He felt strongly that students should enjoy and pursue their own fascinations with the natural world. When he died, Ray was engaged in many projects including his work with native trilliums, violets and a book, *Fragrant Plants of the West*. That book will be available online in early 2013.

Many people have shared stories about Ray and here are a few excerpts.

Founding UCSC Chancellor, Dean McHenry affectionately referred to Ray as the "Shy Genius."

Ed Landels, for whom the New Zealand Garden was named, once characterized Ray as being "...worth paying admission."

UCSC Professor Emeritus of Biology, Todd Newberry said that "Ray Collett personified UCSC at its very best: vision, integrity, imagination, accomplishment."

Rodger and Gwen Elliot, among the world's most highly decorated horticulturists and Australian native plant conservationists, said that "...meeting Ray Collett changed our lives forever."

Richard Turner, Editor of *Pacific Horticulture*, wrote recently "...Ray has certainly left an exceptional legacy, in the Arboretum and its collections, in the introductions of many fine plants, and in countless students who benefited from his knowledge. Would that we all were able to make so many wonderful contributions to the world."

Luen Miller, a student of Ray's from the 1970s and local nurseryman wrote, "Essentially all of what we see at the Arboretum today is the result of over thirty years of Ray's interest, vision, and direction. He was arguably the first person in California horticulture to correctly understand the cultural needs and preferences of plants such as *Grevillea* and *Leucadendron* that have become critically important to gardeners, landscapers and nursery professionals throughout California. Under his direction the Arboretum certainly made more worthwhile, lasting introductions to our trade than any other institution in the US, possibly in the world."

Brett Hall
Arboretum Director
UCSC Santa Cruz, CA

Letter to Joe Bunnett follows

2007 Mar 14
From Ray Collett
Joe,

I have a simple story that no organic chemist could ever believe. Just before I retired I succumbed to some widespread propaganda. I went to see my first doctor, though I had no symptoms of anything and was sure I was in perfect health. The medical world had news for me. They told me in their best terror talk: I could have a few more years to live if I showed up for an emergency prostatectomy. Prostatectomies are grand, but after healing part way up, I got the very best medical news: The operation was too late. My cancer had spread.

Because I had the best health insurance in the world, I got to go to UCSF for whatever the best cancer research center could do. The radiation man never showed, and I missed out on that. I went back a second time, but the doctor I was to see never showed. Anyway in the 7 hours I sat in a huge prostate cancer ward, with fellow patients in all stages of dying, I learned a smell I could never forget. The worse they smelled of it, the sicker they looked. Since I always knew that beef-eaters don't smell like pork-eaters and not the slightest like vegans, I tried my best to smell out what all those dying patients ate. After 7 hours in a big cancer ward, I believed I knew more than enough about the dietary preferences of dying prostate cancer patients.

In short: I left, and, following the instructions of my nose, changed my diet. Within 2 weeks (as I would smooth my PSA graph), I had no detectable PSA at all. Years have passed, and I still don't.

I cured my cancer for 0¢. Nobody has better proof of having had spreading cancer. Nobody has better proof of not having been cured with radiation or pills. I often thought the medical world would like to know.

I'd gladly respond to anything that comes my way. I can convincingly show people my scars, and you can pass this on. Unfortunately, I really don't belong in a gathering centered on food. I often go down to Emily's, where I can have some control. I enjoy seeing you and others there.

Ray

Joseph Bunnett wrote:

Ray, I write to urge you to participate in the bi-monthly luncheon meeting of the UCSC Emeriti Group to be held on Thursday of this week in the Cowell College Provost's House. It starts at 11:30 a.m., the first half hour being a time for casual conversation while drinking a little wine, if that be your taste. Lunch is served at noon, and about 12:40 the speaker is introduced. I don't know who will be the speaker this time, but they are all good. And there is some time for discussion with the speaker at the end of his formal talk.

You will enjoy contacts with old friends as well as what you may learn from the speaker.

You should tell our Secretary-Treasurer-coordinator that you will be coming. He is Stanley D Stevens and his e-mail address is: sstevens@library.ucsc.edu.

I look forward to seeing you there. Also, I want to introduce you to my son, Alfred, from Minneapolis, who will be there as my guest.

Cheers,
Joe Bunnett