

## Bernice Giduz Schubert, 1913–2000

It is with an overwhelming sense of loss that we record the death on August 14, 2000, of Bernice Schubert, botanist, editor, colleague, and friend of the Arnold Arboretum, whose career at Harvard encompassed a total of fifty-three years, first at the Gray Herbarium and later at the Arnold Arboretum.

Dr. Schubert was born on October 6, 1913, in Boston. She graduated from the Massachusetts College of Agriculture (now part of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst) in 1935 and earned both an A.M. (1937) and a Ph.D. (1942) from Radcliffe College. She was employed at the Gray Herbarium part time while a student (1936–1941) and later full time (1941–1949), working as a technical assistant in plant taxonomy and, more importantly, as editorial aide to Professor Merritt Fernald, then director of the Gray Herbarium, on his two major works, the eighth edition of *Gray's Manual of Botany* (1951) and *Edible Wild Plants of Eastern North America* (1958), coauthored with Kinsey, plus a decade of individual publications.

When Professor Fernald died, about three months after publication of the *Manual*, Dr. Schubert went to the Jardin Botanique de l'État in Brussels on a Guggenheim fellowship where she worked on Leguminosae of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda Urundi. Upon her return to the United States in November 1952, she was employed in the Plant Introduction Section of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, Maryland. The first phase of her work there involved the taxonomy of North and Central American species of the genus *Dioscorea*. In a second and related phase, she cooperated with chemists of the National Institutes of Health in a search for plants with alkaloids of potential use in treating high blood pressure, collecting samples in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico, and Brazil. A summary publication coauthored with J. J. Willaman, "Alkaloid-Bearing Plants and Their

Contained Alkaloids," was issued in 1961 as U.S.D.A. Technical Bulletin 1234.

In the fall of 1962 Dr. Schubert came to the Arnold Arboretum, first as associate curator and later as curator—an unusual appointment for a woman at a time when there were no women on the roster of Harvard's biology department, and when curatorial appointments were the academic equivalent of associate or full professor. In addition to her curatorial work, as senior lecturer she served as advisor to both undergraduate and graduate biology students and, from 1969 through 1975, she was supervisor of the Harvard University Herbaria building, an arduous task with many interruptions and little appreciation. And when my successor as director, Peter Ashton, was delayed by visa problems, she filled in as acting director of the Arboretum in Cambridge from July 1 to September 30, 1978, bridging the gap with her usual competence and outspoken distaste for administrative jobs.

Dr. Schubert's prime responsibility was as editor of the *Journal of the Arnold Arboretum*, a post she filled until 1975, after which she chaired the editorial committee (now known as the joint Arnold Arboretum-Gray Herbarium publication committee). In 1984, to honor both her retirement and her seventieth birthday, the *Journal* staff dedicated number 3 of volume 65 to her. It was said then and can be repeated now that during her tenure as editor, the *Journal* was considered one of the best-edited botanical periodicals of its kind, and she was known to all her authors as a kind editor.

Over the course of her long career, Dr. Schubert received a great deal of recognition. She was honored for her work on the genus *Begonia* with the Eva Kenworthy Gray award of the American Begonia Society and by a Silver Medal of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. She was an honorary member of the Sociedad Botanica de Mexico and a fellow of the Linnean Society of London. Other memberships



included the Société Royale de Botanique de Belgique; the Washington Academy of Sciences; the American Society of Plant Taxonomists; the International Association of Plant Taxonomy (where she served as secretary of both the Standing Committee on Stabilization and of the Committee on Nomina Ambigua); the American Institute of Biological Sciences; the Botanical Society of America; the New England Botanical Club; and the Society of Economic Botany (where she served on the Council). In 1978 she served on the committee on Desmodieae for the International Legume Conference held at Kew. A full listing of Dr. Schubert's ninety-four publications will be given in *Taxon*. Among them are twenty-nine papers on *Begonia*, nineteen on *Desmodium*, twelve on steroids, eleven on *Dioscorea*, in addition to obituaries, book reviews, and articles on miscellaneous other subjects.

Dr. Schubert welcomed all visitors to the Harvard University Herbaria, offering a tour of the Jamaica Plain collections or of the botanists' graves at Mt. Auburn Cemetery. She often entertained in her apartment, a botanical treasure-house of museum-quality artifacts; the "wooden flowers of El Fortin" were a particular interest. For years her living room was dominated by a full-size loom on which she practiced weaving as a hobby. In her last years she continued to entertain students and professional botanists at restaurants, still exercising her talent for making each guest feel special.

My own sixty-year association with Bernice Schubert began when we were fellow graduate students in the Radcliffe laboratory of the Gray Herbarium and it continued through our years of retirement. I developed a deep respect and appreciation for this remarkable woman whose contributions to the Arboretum and the Her-



baria were unprecedented both in number and variety, and this at a time when the careers of most women in botany were limited to short-term appointments to the *Generic Flora of the Southeastern United States* project or as research fellows, Mercer fellows, herbarium assistants, or, vaguely, as botanists.

Her ashes are buried in Mt. Auburn Cemetery where Asa Gray, Sereno Watson, Merritt L. Fernald, Oakes Ames, Charles Schweinfurth, Reed Rollins, and other former Harvard botanists are interred.

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Howard, Richard A. 2000. "Remembering Bernice G. Schubert, 1913-2000." *Arnoldia* 60(2), 44-45.

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