

Washington Biologists' Field Club

Shad Bake, 30 April 2022

Memorial for William Louis Stern

William ("Bill") Louis Stern was born September 10, 1926, raised, and schooled in Paterson, New Jersey where he concentrated in agricultural subjects at Central High School. He graduated in 1944 during the last years of World War II and was promptly drafted into the Navy in late 1944. Bill served on Guam until 1946 when he enrolled in the National Farm School (now Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture) in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. He later transferred to Rutgers where he majored in botany and graduated in 1950. Bill continued studying Botany at the University of Illinois where he earned an MS in 1951 and a PhD in 1953.

In 1953, Bill's first academic post was as an instructor (later professor) in the Yale School of Forestry and curator of its extensive wood collection, largest in the world at that time. There, he continued his research in wood anatomy and angiosperm phylogeny. Yale was where our paths initially crossed. I was a first-year graduate student in the Biology Department in Osborn Biological Laboratory next door to the Forestry School. I was in charge of an exhibit case that I changed weekly to support study in the large introductory undergraduate biology class. I borrowed wood specimens from Bill when the class was studying botany.

In 1960, Bill shifted base to curator of the newly created Division of Wood Anatomy in the Botany Department of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. We both served as department chairs under Director Dick Cowan, another WBFC member. Bill remained there for seven years (with an interim appointment at the Forest Products Research Installation in Los Banos in the Philippines under the auspices of the Agricultural Organization of the United Nations). Bill was elected a member of the Washington Biologists' Field Club in 1963. In 1967 he became professor and chair of the Biology Department of the University of Maryland, with another interim appointment in 1978-79 as program chair of systematic biology in the National Science Foundation.

In 1979, Bill moved to the University of Florida in Gainesville as professor and Botany Department Chair. There, his research focus changed to orchids, their vegetative anatomy and phylogeny. He became emeritus professor in 2002. Bill died in Florida on November 1, 2021, at the age of 95. He was married to Flory Stern who died in 1999. They had two children, Paul Elihu Stern, an attorney, and Susan Myra Stern, a horticulturist, and five grandchildren.

Bill also found time to serve as editor of the journals *Tropical Woods*, *Plant Science Bulletin*, a monograph series of the Torrey Botanical Club, *Bioscience*, *Economic Botany*, *World of Wood*, *Phytomorphology*, and founding editor of *Biotropica*. He was also on the advisory board of the Tropical Botanical Garden, and a trustee of the Fairchild Tropical Garden and Kampong Center for Tropical Botany and Horticulture in southern Florida.

Despite his numerous changes in research, teaching and administrative venues, Bill maintained a steady research publication record and supervision of graduate students. I found an impressive array of tributes from colleagues and former students. A *Quarterly Review of Biology* report on *Humanistic Botany*, a college textbook for non-majors that he co-authored with Oswald Tippo in 1977 and that Alice Tangerini illustrated, was called “clearly superb” and “ideal.” The reviewer concluded, “This textbook builds a bridge between laymen and plant biology more successfully than any other book I know.” Bill was truly a giant in Botanical research and teaching.

George Watson