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Dr. Charles Bixler Heiser, PhD, 89

OCT. 5, 1920 — JUNE 11, 2010

BLOOMINGTON — Charles Bixler Heiser, Jr., was born in Cynthiana, Ind., on Oct. 5, 1920, to Charles Bixler Heiser Sr. and Ines Metcalf Heiser. After living several places in Indiana (Princeton, Evansville, New Albany, Vincennes, Indianapolis, Bloomington, Columbus) his parents moved to Belleville, Ill. where he attended high school. In 1939, he enrolled in Washington University (St. Louis) majoring in Botany and English, lettering in basketball for three years and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

In his second year as a graduate student, he coached the University's Basketball Team. At the University, the two professors who had the most influence on him were Dr. Edgar Anderson and Dr. R.E. Woodson, Jr.

He married Dorothy Gaebler on Aug. 19, 1944. They have three children, Lynn Marie Monzo, Cynthia Roberts Hall, and Charles Bixler III and wife, Carolyn; seven grandchildren.

In 1945, he enrolled in the graduate program in Botany at the University of California at Berkeley where Dr. G. Ledyard Stebbins was most influential. In his second year as a student, he taught in Botany at the University of California at Davis and was in charge of the herbarium there.

After receiving his Doctoral Degree from California in 1947, he came to Indiana University as Assistant Professor of Botany and Curator of the Herbarium. Except for a Visiting Professorship at the University of Texas in 1979, all of his teaching has been done at Indiana University where he became Distinguished Professor in 1979 and Professor Emeritus in 1986.

His first sabbatical leave was spent in Costa Rica in 1953 to study chili peppers and to learn the flora. His meetings of two students, Jorge Soria and Jaime Diaz from Ecuador at the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Science at Turrialba, Costa Rica, was particularly important, for he was to spend his next two sabbaticals in Ecuador (1962, 1969) and they were most helpful.

In 1969 on his way to Quito, with wife and two children, he would also visit Cuba, after several armed passengers boarded the plane at Guayaquil and demanded that the pilots take them to Havana. In 1975 on a National Science Senior Post Doctoral Fellowship, he was to spend his time in Ecuador and Peru. At a meeting to celebrate his Fifty Years at Indiana University in 1996, he received a plaque from INIAP (the National Institute of Ecuador for Agricultural Research) for assisting in their research.

His other most significant honors and awards follow: American Society of Plant Taxonomists, President, 1967; Asa Gray Award, 1988; Raven Outreach Award, 2002 (for his books); Botanical Society of America, Merit Award, 1972, President, 1980; Centennial Award, 2007; Society for the Study of Evolution, President, 1974; Society for Economic Botany, President, 1978; Distinguished Economic Botanist, 1984. He also served on the committee that founded the Society; Gleason Award of the New York Botanical Garden, 1969; Guggenheim Fellowship, 1953; Pustovoit Award of the International Sunflower Association, 1985; elected to the National Academy of Sciences, 1987; Distinguished Scholar Award, Indiana Academy of Science, 1997.

His early research, beginning in the 1940s, was with the sunflower. He showed that hybridization was important in its evolution, and he made artificial hybrids to document those that he claimed occurred naturally.

He also studied the origin and development of the sunflower domesticated for its seed, showing that it was one of the few crops to have been domesticated in what is now the United States. He has since been interested in the origin and domestication of a number of other crops, most recently the naranjilla or lulo, a crop grown for its juice, in southern Central America and the northern Andes. He developed the variety now most widely grown in Ecuador.

In addition to his many scientific papers, he has published six semi-popular books dealing mostly with plants. *Nightshades, the Paradoxical Plants*, 1969 (slightly revised and published as *The Fascinating World of the Nightshades: Tobacco, Mandrake, Potato, Pepper, Eggplant, etc.*, 1987); *Seed to Civilization, the Story of Food*, 1973 (3rd ed, 1990); *The Sunflower*, 1976; *The Gourd Book*, 1979; *Of Plants and People*, 1985; *Weeds in my Garden*, 2003 (received Garden Globe Award "for best talent/writing" in 2004).

He also took pride in his introduction of two ornamental plants: the ball loofah or "Luffa operculata" and *Peperomia Serpens 'Tena'*, neither of which has become invasive.

At Indiana University, he has taught courses in Survey of Vascular Plants; Systematics of Flowering Plants; Economic Botany or Ethnobotany and Evolution. Twenty-nine students have received their Ph.D. degrees under his direction.

After 89 vigorous years, he died on June 11, 2010, at Bell Trace Health and Living Center.

Cremation Service is entrusted to Bloomington Cremation Society under the direction of Nathan Butler Funeral Home. Online messages of condolence to the bereaved family may be expressed at [www.forevercare.org](http://www.forevercare.org).