

## Charles B. Heiser, Jr.

Cynthiana is a town near the southwest corner of Indiana with a population of fewer than 900 persons. That Charles Bixler Heiser was born there provides further evidence that a disproportionate number of distinguished Americans have had their origins in small rural communities. The Heisers were highly mobile. Charlie attended eight different grammar schools before the family settled in St. Louis, Missouri, long enough to allow him continuous attendance at one high school and entry into Washington University. At Washington University, Charlie was attracted to botany, and he received the A.B. in 1943 and the M.A. in 1944. It was at Washington that he came under the influence and sponsorship of Edgar Anderson, an outstanding plant taxonomist and member of the National Academy of Sciences. Anderson recognized Charlie's unique qualities and remained both a mentor and a promoter throughout his early career.

After some teaching at Washington University, Charlie went to the University of California at Berkeley, where in 1947 he earned the Ph.D. with another distinguished botanist, Ledyard Stebbins. Through study at Berkeley and incidental employment at the Davis campus, Charlie became well acquainted with many who were or later became leaders in botanical taxonomy and morphology. By the time he was appointed as assistant professor at Indiana University in 1947, he was already well known and exceedingly well skilled in determining the recent evolutionary history of flowering plants. His application of these skills was recognized at IU, where he became associate professor in 1951, professor in 1957, and distinguished professor in 1979.

Charlie's early research was with the genus *Helianthus*, to which he had been introduced by Edgar Anderson. This genus includes some ornamental forms, as well as the Jerusalem artichoke and, more importantly, the common annual sunflower of our gardens. The common sunflower had been domesticated by North American Indians, the seeds becoming an important food source for tribes living at middle latitudes. This species was adopted in Russia, and later in the United States, as a major oil crop. Through his studies of the sunflower Charlie became involved in the origin of agriculture through domestication of wild plants and in the continued economic significance of certain plant products.

These interests led him to explore other plant groups that had representatives that were significant as food for the American Indian or had potential significance in modern agriculture. He became the leading international authority on such diverse groups as red peppers and other solanaceae, edible amaranths and chenopods, vegetable sponges, gourds, edible lupines and shamrocks, and even the sedge, *Totora*, from which Andean Indians built their reed boats. Thus he became a resource person for both anthropologists and modern plant breeders. In pursuing his studies, Charlie, with his students, developed and applied a large number of new techniques and procedures that could be employed to assess relationships among plants. He traveled frequently to Central and South America to collect materials and to study Indian agriculture. He became well known and highly regarded among resident botanists.

Charlie's distinction has been recognized nationally. He received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1953 and a National Academy of Sciences fellowship in 1962. He was elected president of the American Society for Plant Taxonomy for 1967, of the Society for the Study of Evolution for 1974, of the Society for Economic Botany for 1977, and of the Botanical Society of America for 1980, after holding a number of other offices in these societies. He has also received special awards from the New York Botanical Garden and the International Sunflower Association. Besides receiving a distinguished professorship from Indiana University, he was named Distinguished Economic Botanist for 1984 by the Society for Economic Botany.

While these honors attest to his research significance, he has never neglected teaching. More than thirty students received their doctorates under his guidance. He has taught a variety of undergraduate courses including, in recent years, courses in economic botany and agricultural origins that were popular among students majoring in other departments. He enjoys lecturing and writing, and he injects into these activities a natural humor that enlivens his materials. This knack has been particularly well revealed in his several semi-technical and popular books, which bring to the general public the experiences and insight gained through his travel and research.

On many of his travels he was accompanied by his wife, Dorothy, who also served as critic and consultant for much of his writing—as well as mother to their three children, Lynn, Cynthia, and Bix. Dorothy has also been hostess at a great many gatherings of students, University guests, and friends.

All who have been influenced by him will be relieved to know that Charlie will retire only from making and grading exams and from the rigidity of class schedules. He has already adopted a new plant genus to explore and is outlining in his mind another popular book.

Charles W. Hagen, Jr.