
William A. Weber receives ABLS lifetime achievement awards

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William Alfred Weber has in 2018 received the first-ever lifetime achievement awards from the American Bryological and Lichenological Society (ABLS). His broad and extensive career was the basis for awarding him both the Elizabeth G. Britton award for bryology and the Chicita F. Culberson Culberson award for lichenology.

Weber, a Fellow of the Linnean Society and the 2018 recipient of the IAL Acharius Medal (Fig. 1; see text below), was born in New York City on November 16th 1918. At five years old, he looked through a microscope given to him by an older cousin for the first time, a revelatory experience many readers of this journal will surely understand. Dr. Weber often speaks with fondness of his apprenticeship in New York with mentors such as Josiah Otis Swift, a nature columnist and leader of the Yosian Brotherhood of Nature Philosophers, an introduction to botany through identifying winter trees and shrubs with a Columbia University graduate student, his friendship with Roger Tory Peterson, and his access to the backrooms of the American Museum where Ernst Mayr held court.



Figure 1. L to R: Frank Bungartz, ABLS President-Elect and meeting organizer holding the Elizabeth Britton award certificate, William Weber, daughter Heather Harris holding Acharius Award medal, Tim Hogan, Erin Tripp holding the Chicita Culberson award certificate.

Bill Weber received his undergraduate degree from Iowa State College in 1940, the same year he married his wife, Selma ('Sammie') Ruth Hermann, with whom he had three daughters, Linna, Heather, and Erica. From Iowa State he pursued graduate studies at Washington State University – studies interrupted by the Second World War in which he served as a conscientious objector. After the war ended, he returned to graduate school and completed his PhD in 1946. Weber arrived in Boulder, Colorado in 1946 to begin his tenure at the University of Colorado, first as a member of the Biology Department, and after 1962, as a Professor of Natural History in the University of Colorado Museum. He immediately set to work building an herbarium from a nucleus of 32,000 specimens, 2,000 of which were bryophytes of Geneva Sayre. In 1952 he began his work on lichens, and in 1957-58 he held an N.S.F. Fellowship at the National Museum in Stockholm to study their lichen collections. It was in Stockholm that he met and established a professional relationship with Eric Hultén of vascular plant biogeography fame.

Dr. Weber has travelled extensively across the world, studying and collecting lichens, bryophytes, and vascular plants throughout western North America from Alaska to Mexico, in Europe from Scandinavia to Greece, the Galápagos Islands, Chile and Peru, Australia and Papua New Guinea, the mountains of Altai, and Nepal with the 1980 American Women's Climbing Expedition to Dhaulagiri. His original lichen and moss collections from the Galápagos in the 1940s established a baseline for other lichenologists and bryologists to build on, most notably, Frank Bungartz, now at Arizona State University. He has also advised and mentored such prominent lichenologists as D.D. Awasthi from India (another recipient of the Acharius Medal), Roger Anderson, and Toby Spribille, as well as current ABLS President Catherine La Farge in bryology. He has been honored with eponyms for over thirty taxa.

Collections from North America formed the nucleus of his extraordinary Lichen Exsiccati of 700 numbers distributed to 60 herbaria across the world with a total of 42,000 specimens. And from that small collection of 32,000 collections in 1946, the University of Colorado Herbarium (COLO) now holds over 550,000 specimens—mainly vascular plants, bryophytes, and lichens, with smaller collections of algae and fungi. With well over 40% of the collection consisting of cryptogams, the herbarium reflects the breadth of Dr. Weber's botanical expertise and the sheer amount of energy devoted to building such a unique collection.



Figure 2. Bill Weber with family. L to R: Great-granddaughters Kelly and Kira Enloe, daughter Heather Harris, William Weber, granddaughter Heidi Alina, great-granddaughter Maisha Diatta.

As he conducted research on both cryptogams and vascular plants, he also taught many classes for university students, and mentored both undergraduates and graduates in several fields of botanical and ecological endeavor. His outreach to the broader cryptogam biologist community included teaching summer field courses and workshops on cryptogams for students, amateurs, and working professionals.

Bill Weber is a botanist's botanist. His knowledge of the Colorado flora and beyond is encyclopedic and unprecedented, from a systematic and ecological perspective to phytogeographic connections and taxonomic quandaries. He was tireless in working to establish small herbaria in National Parks and Monuments across the state of Colorado – at Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Dinosaur, Mesa Verde, Rocky Mountain, and Florissant. His series of vascular floras extending over five decades were directed as much to interested amateurs as trained professionals. With his colleague, Ron Wittmann, he published the Bryophytes of Colorado in 2007. And still, as he approaches his 100th birthday, he carries a child-like inquisitiveness into each and every day.

The awards ceremony was held August 15, 2018 at the annual ABLs meeting at the University of Colorado's Mountain Research Station (MRS) near Boulder where Bill Weber resides (general meeting report in *The Bryologist* 121(4); awards ceremony video posted on abls.org). It was held outside on a beautiful afternoon (Figures 1 and 2), attended by 63 ABLs members; Weber was accompanied by his daughter Heather Harris, a grandchild, three great-grandchildren and a long-time friend. Frank Bungartz (ASU herbarium lichen curator) gave a moving testimonial to Weber's generous help as Frank updated and expanded the Galápagos lichens flora, as he presented to Dr. Weber the Acharius Medal awarded by the International Association of Lichenologists (IAL) at their July 2018 meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Tim Hogan (collections manager, UC Boulder herbarium) and Erin Tripp (UC Boulder Assistant Professor and the current herbarium curator succeeding Bill Weber) presented the ABLs lifetime achievement award certificates with a summary by Tim of Dr. Weber's long career; ABLs President Catherine LaFarge contributed a testimonial from her own experiences with Weber. Bill Weber sang songs and recited poetry at appropriate moments in the ceremony, then stayed after dinner to reminisce with meeting participants.