

New England Botanical Club – Minutes of the 1035th Meeting
4 April 2008

Bryan Hamlin, Recording Secretary

The 808th meeting of the New England Botanical Club, being the 1035th since its original organization, was held in the lecture hall of the Fairchild Biochemistry building at Harvard University on Friday, April 4th, 2008, with 44 members and guests in attendance.

The meeting began with a number of announcements. This year's Fernald Award for the best article in *Rhodora* was presented to David S. Barrington and Catherine A. Paris for their paper "Refugia and migration in the Quaternary history of the New England flora" David, receiving the award on behalf of the two authors, noted that he is an academic grandchild of Merritt Lyndon Fernald, because his thesis advisor, Rolla Tryon, was a student of Fernald's. David noted that Rolla's interest in plant geography is what sparked his own interest. Dr. Barrington also made his annual announcement on the blooming of the early crocus at the University of Vermont: this year they bloomed on March 1st, a bit later than the February 22nd bloom date of last year.

The full-time position of State Botanist for Massachusetts is currently being advertised. Those interested should go to the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species website. There are also 2 or 3 student summer internships being offered by the Harvard Herbarium. A reminder was also made for people to sign up for the June field trip to the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Registrations are due by May 1st.

Our annual Distinguished Speaker, Dr. Dan H. Nicolson, was introduced by his long-time friend Kanchi Gandhi, who first worked with Dan in India in 1971. Kanchi described Dan as a leading authority on plant nomenclature and as the "nomenclature guru of India," with four South Asian species named in his honor, and nine world-wide. Dr. Nicolson's research interest has been the Araceae, and in 1999 he was presented the H. W. Schott Award for Excellence in Aroid Research.

Dr. Nicolson gave a fascinating talk, entitled "My Beautiful Life," which he illustrated with many excellent photos of his life and of plants. His 60 years of botanical experience started at age 15, when he accompanied his father and a colleague as they introduced hybrid corn to Europe. He obtained his B.S. from Grinnell College in 1955, writing his senior thesis on "The genus *Asclepias* in Iowa." It was published with his professor, Norman H. Russell, as co-author. Dan then went to Stanford University to earn an MBA, but he spent enough time in the herbarium there to earn the nickname "Herbie." After receiving his MBA in 1957, he realized plants were really his passion, and he went to Cornell University, where he earned another Master's degree in 1959, the same year he married his wife, Alice, also a botanist. The young couple took off for an extended tour of several Asian countries (Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya, and Thailand), affording Dan unprecedented experience with often undocumented aroid species. It was during this time that he developed a special interest in the aroid genus *Aglaonema*. After his return to the USA, he completed his doctoral dissertation, a revision of the genus *Aglaonema*, in 1964, and immediately took a position in the Department of Botany at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC, not knowing that he would remain there throughout his long career until his retirement in 2006.

Over the years, Dr. Nicolson made repeated visits to Asia, working with botanists in various countries and becoming an authority plant nomenclature. This involved the detailed study, along with two Indian botanists, of a pre-Linnaean, 17th century Dutch 12-volume publication by Van Rheedee "Hortus Malabaricus" on the plants of India. Among his over 200 publications there is a flora of the dicots of Dominica, co-authored by his wife, and the botany of the Second Expedition of Captain James Cook, co-authored by Raymond Fosberg. Nicolson has published papers on botanical orthography and serves on the editorial board of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (since 1981).

During this talk about his travels and research in Asian countries, Dr. Nicolson showed many photographs of the scenery and of the plants, including various exotic aroid genera such as *Scindapsus* and *Epipremnum*, as well as exotic species from the more familiar genera *Arum* and *Arisaema*. With all his traveling, he and Alice had three children, each born in a different country: Philippines in 1960, Lebanon in 1962, and Washington, DC, in 1964, clearly another part of his "beautiful life."