

OBITUARIES

WAYNE REYNOLDS FAIRCLOTH

1932-2008

A native of rural Grady County in southern Georgia, Wayne R. Faircloth grew up on his family farm there. As was then generally the case in the rural south, he undoubtedly spent many hours exploring the vast outdoors, developing keen powers of observation and what would become a lifelong interest in natural history, but most especially plants and descriptive botany. This region of Georgia is topographically and floristically diverse, its plant communities ranging from mesic slope forests with Appalachian affinities to subtly diverse, fire-dependent rolling longleaf pine – wiregrass savannas and their associated pitcher-plant bogs to bottomland swamps and woods along the creeks and rivers. Undoubtedly, Wayne Faircloth was influenced early by the natural diversity and immense beauty of his homeland, and by its people. Shortly after I arrived at Valdosta State College (now University) in the fall of 1984, Professor Faircloth recommended that I read *The Other Florida* (Jahoda 1967). This wonderful book provided for me considerable insight into the region, and his recommendation of it a window into his psyche, which, in retrospect, has only heightened my respect for him.

Wayne Faircloth attended public school in Whigham, Georgia, graduating from Whigham High School with Honors in 1948. After only two years of college, at age 18, Wayne began his teaching career at Whigham School. He first taught science to fourth and fifth graders and then taught high school biology and chemistry. He continued his pursuit of higher education at Valdosta State College, earning the B.S. degree in Biology with Honors in 1955. Subsequently, he earned the M.Ed. in Biology and Science Education from the University of North Carolina in 1959. While in residence as a faculty member at Valdosta State, he completed degree requirements and earned the Ph.D. in Botany from the University of Georgia in 1971. His dissertation, under the direction of Dr. Wilbur H. Duncan, was titled *Vascular Flora of Central South Georgia*, and his dissertation research involved substantial field work and resulted in his extensive collection of voucher specimens. These specimens were deposited primarily at Valdosta State, where they and his subsequent collections form the nucleus of the Valdosta State University Herbarium. His duplicate specimens were deposited at the University of Georgia Herbarium, the University of North Carolina Herbarium, and other herbaria. Prior to Dr. Faircloth's employment at Valdosta State, the herbarium was a small teaching collection consisting of several hundred specimens mostly collected by his former teacher, Dr. Beatrice Nevins. But for all practical purposes, Dr. Faircloth established the Valdosta State Herbarium (VSC), for it was under his curatorship that it grew from a small teaching collection to a recognized research facility, exchanging and lending specimens and receiving official recognition among the World's herbaria by listing in *Index Herbariorum* (Holmgren et al. 1990). When he stepped down as

Curator of the Herbarium in 1984 in order to become Head of the Biology Department, VSC comprised more than 30K accessions.

Dr. Faircloth was a generalist of the Old School, who believed that broad training in biology and the ancillary sciences was essential. More than once, he lamented the increasingly narrow focus of teaching and research in biology. First and foremost he was a teacher, and he was unusual as such nowadays in having taught at all levels from elementary school through college. He gained substantial teaching and administrative experience prior to his service as a faculty member at Valdosta State at his *alma mater*, Whigham High School, in rural Grady County. His record of service and promotion at Whigham High School and subsequently at Valdosta State University leave no doubt about his considerable abilities as a teacher and as an administrator. He was Science Instructor at Whigham High School from 1951-1954 and Biology Instructor and Chairman of the Science Department from 1956-1958. In 1959 he was appointed Vice Principal while serving as Biology and Chemistry Instructor, and he became Principal in 1960. Subsequently, he left Whigham after receiving an invitation to teach at his *alma mater*, Valdosta State College, in 1961, where he remained until his retirement. At Valdosta State he ascended through the ranks becoming Associate Professor in 1967, Professor in 1971, Acting Head of the Department in 1984, and Head of the Department in 1985. He remained Head of the Department until illness forced him to retire in 1996, when he was appointed Emeritus Professor of Biology.

In 1966, Wayne married Juanita Jane Norsworthy who graduated with a B.S. in Biology at Valdosta State in 1965. As his student, Juanita had completed a Directed Study project documenting the pteridophytes of nearby Echols County, Georgia, which was published in the *American Fern Journal* (Norsworthy 1966). Wayne and Juanita had three children, Anna Marjorie, Amy Claire, and Wilson Henry, and, at the time of his death, six grandchildren.

Dr. Faircloth's professional and honorary memberships included the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Botanical Society of America, the American Fern Society, the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, the Association of Southeastern Biologists, the Georgia Academy of Science, the Phi Kappa Phi Scholastic Fraternity, the Alpha Chi Honor Society, the Phi Sigma Honorary Biological Society, and the Omicron Delta Kappa Honorary Service Fraternity. He was a member of the Executive Board of the Georgia Academy of Science, serving as President of that organization in 1975-1976. He chaired the Advisory Board for Reed Bingham State Park 1973-1977, and was a member of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Advisory Commission on Protected Plant Species that developed Georgia's official Protected Plants List. He also served for many years on the Editorial Board of *Tipularia*, the Journal of the Georgia Botanical Society. He was elected an Outstanding Educator of America in 1972 and a Fellow of the Georgia Academy of Science in 1977. In 1981, he received the Award of Merit, the highest honor given by the Garden Club of Georgia, and in 1984 he received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Valdosta State Alumni Association. He was instrumental in establishing the Tree Commission of the City of Valdosta, was a Charter Member of that organization, and served as its Chair from 1986-1994,

and he was active on various other boards and committees of local civic importance.

In a 1995 resume, Dr. Faircloth cited his research interests as vascular flora of the Atlantic-Gulf Coastal Plain, biosystematics of *Ophioglossum* in the United States, biosystematics of *Baptisia arachnifera* Duncan, and ecosystem preservation of rare and endangered species in Georgia. He is perhaps best known for his substantial research documenting the flora of south-central Georgia that stemmed from his dissertation and his work with pteridophytes.

Dr. Faircloth donated his field notebooks to the Valdosta State University Herbarium, where they currently reside. He used the standard method of ascribing serial collection numbers to his vouchers. His first field notebook entry was made on November 7, 1961, and appropriately, in light of his special interest in pteridophytes, it was a collection of *Lycopodium carolinianum* L. from a wet, exposed roadside ditch alongside Highway GA 31, 3½ miles south of Pearson in Atkinson County, Georgia.

Dr. Faircloth's field notebook data entries are meticulously and neatly recorded and complete, including observations of habitat and habit. Perusing his field notes, one finds that on 07 March 1999, near the end of his last field notebook he made a data entry for his number 8953, a collection of *Ophioglossum crotalophoroides* Walt. from Calvary, Grady County, Georgia, growing in the lawn of the Piedmont P. B. Church near where he would be laid to rest. Then turning the leaf to the penultimate inscribed page one finds the following annotation in his ever neat and deliberate, cursive hand.

Note, little field work was done in the years 1996-1999. I retired from Valdosta State University, moved to the family farm in Grady County, Georgia, and was involved in clearing and landscaping the area around a new homesite. I was diagnosed as having Multiple Myeloma in August 1999 and was on heavy doses of chemotherapy through 2000. I am presently (April 2001) in remission after a stem-cell transplant in December 2000.

Knowing Wayne as I did, I believe it was not mere happenstance that he started and ended his career as a field botanist vouchering native pteridophytes. For, although a generalist of the Old School and a floristician, he held a special interest in this particular group of plants. Given the importance of life cycles and life history in biology, the completion of cycles in Wayne's life is of special interest – his return to the family homeplace upon retirement, then the collection of a pteridophyte at the end of a long, productive career as a field botanist and teacher.

Beyond this, as if a postscript, he subsequently recorded one voucher data entry for each of the dates 18 April 2001 and 27 April 2002, his numbers 8954 and 8955, both of *Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv., from Bainbridge in Decatur County, Georgia, and Brooksville in Hernando County, Florida, respectively. It is moving to consider that his very last collections were of a Federal Noxious Weed that only recently had invaded his beloved Georgia Coastal Plain, which most certainly underscores his concern for the devastating effects on natural

ecosystems of short-sighted, selfishly motivated, and ignorant human actions. Congruously, Wayne's son, Wilson, earned the B.S. in Botany from the University of Georgia in 1997 and was awarded the Ph.D. in Weed Science from Auburn University in 2004, with *Imperata cylindrica* the subject of his research.

References Cited

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