

Robert Theodore Clausen

December 26, 1911 — December 31, 1981

Robert T. Clausen, professor emeritus of biology, was born in New York City, the son of Adam and Mary Blum Clausen. His early childhood was spent in that city and subsequently in Passaic, New Jersey, where he graduated from high school in 1929. His interest in natural history developed during his boyhood, and at various times during his early career he was concerned with birds, insects, reptiles, and amphibians as well as with plants, and he published on each of the animal groups.

Professor Clausen entered Cornell University in the fall of 1929, beginning an association that lasted until his death. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1933, having completed a dual major in vertebrate zoology and botany. His graduate work was carried on in botany and plant taxonomy under the direction of Professor Karl M. Wiegand. He received the Master of Arts degree in 1934, his thesis dealing with the fern genus *Botrychium* in northeastern North America, and the Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1937, with a monograph on the family *Ophioglossaceae*. He became a member of the American Fern Society in his student years and served a three-year term as its president after receiving his doctorate.

On completion of his degree program, Professor Clausen continued his association with the L. H. Bailey Hortorium, where he had been employed as a graduate student, first as an instructor (1937-39), then as assistant professor of botany (1939-41). The latter title continued when he joined the Department of Botany in 1941. There he gained the rank of associate professor in 1944 and professor in 1949. In 1954 he also became curator of the Wiegand Herbarium. He served in this dual capacity until his retirement in 1977, when he was awarded emeritus status.

Professor Clausen was a superb though demanding teacher. Plant anatomy, which he taught for thirty-six years, is not a subject easily taught. He knew how to reach students. His lectures were logically and clearly presented but required close attention. In his unique way he was a marvelous storyteller, and he used that talent to bring his lectures to life. He was a man of incredible energy, and on weekday afternoons he would lead the class to such well-known natural history sites as McLean Bogs or South Hill Swamp. On weekends the forays were longer. He was ever present in the teaching laboratory and equally accessible to students outside for serious discussion. His influence on undergraduates passing through his courses was great, and many went on to pursue professional careers in botany. In recognition of his commitment to teaching, he received the Chancellor's Award for excellence in teaching from the State University of New York in 1974.

Professor Clausen's research interests covered a range of plant groups. In the late 1930s he pursued taxonomic studies in the ferns, published on several genera of aquatic plants, and began to develop an interest in the *Crassulaceae*. After joining the Department of Botany, Professor Clausen continued these interests, augmenting them with research in selected genera of *Leguminosae* and in *Cyperaceae* and the genus *Gentiana*. Many years were spent in a more general floristic manner, surveying parts of the glaciated Allegheny Plateau in New York and Pennsylvania. He was the acknowledged expert on the flora of the Cayuga Lake region of New York and held an honorary membership in the Torrey Botanical Club.

For over three decades, however, the major thrust of Professor Clausen's research centered on *Sedum* of the *Crassulaceae*, a large and difficult genus of over six hundred species. Meticulous and detailed studies of wild populations in the United States and Mexico and experimental studies on plants grown in the greenhouse and garden provided the basis of his approach. These studies, augmented by more-traditional herbarium studies, led to the publication of two major botanical works: *Sedum of the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt: An Exposition in Taxonomic Methods* (1959), and *Sedum of North America North of the Mexican Plateau* (1975). Until the time of his death he was actively preparing a third book, to be titled *Sedum of the Mexican Cordilleran Plateau*. His two published books about *Sedum* were not only monographs of significance, based on an intimate knowledge of the species studied but also statements concerning his taxonomic philosophy and methods.

Professor Clausen believed strongly in fieldwork, experimental approaches, and statistical analyses in taxonomy, and this belief influenced both his teaching and his own research. Fieldwork carried him from the Labrador Peninsula and British Columbia in the north to Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador in the south. Incidents other than those botanical abounded in his travels, and his stories, dryly but yet hilariously told, often punctuated his seminars and conversations. Because of its great richness in *Sedum*, Mexico held special interest for him, and had not illness prevented it, he would have spent the better part of 1981 in that country. As it was, during the last year of his life he contented himself with writing and with a continuation of his studies on garden and greenhouse plants. These activities were interspersed with periods of hospitalization for treatment of cancer, a disease that Professor Clausen endured for over half his professional career.

Published works constitute only one element of Professor Clausen's writings. As a boy he acquired the habit of keeping a diary, making daily entries. This habit continued throughout his life. His diary comprises thirty-two volumes, covering the period from 1923 until near his death. The journal, together with his field notes and letters

of significance, will be deposited in the Department of Manuscripts and Archives in the Olin Library of Cornell University.

Professor Clausen is survived by his wife, Edna Rublee Clausen, also a botanist, whom he married on January 31, 1942, and four children: Eric Neil, Joanna Margaret, Thomas Paul, and Heidi Elizabeth.

John M. Kingsbury, Charles H. Uhl, David M. Bates