PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS
G. A. FRICK, A CSSA TITAN

What kind of people collect succulents and how did they become interested in the first place? What do they accomplish in their hobby or their work? Gerhard A. Frick, one of the CSSA's founding fathers and a prolific writer for the Journal, serves to personify these questions.

Frick deserves high accolades because through his unflagging effort and loyalty the CSSA and the Journal were not only founded but perpetuated. Initially, Los Angeles was his home but by the late 1930s he had moved to Pasadena. An unpretentious man, he did not seek publicity or personal gain, but gave exceedingly loyal and reliable service to the CSSA and the hobby.

Frick was born in Cleveland, Ohio, March 1, 1878, of German descent; he was the youngest of 10 children. His father, a shoemaker, died when Frick was 8 years old. At 13, he was compelled to leave school and work in a factory.

He started his first cactus collection at 15 with plants given to him by an old German tailor. But Frick's first collection died within a few years from negligence. Career wise, he felt that California offered great opportunities and arrived in Los Angeles in February 1898.

About 1925 he returned to his boyhood hobby and started another cactus collection. He soon learned which cacti were available in the area, but since he had limited time to spend on his collection, he specialized in the Euphorbiaceae, the group of plants he found most gratifying. Frick believed the diverse and engaging forms of the plants made up for their unspectacular flowers. The rarity of this group also appealed to him.

Frick was one of the three persons who started the CSSA and was business manager during the early days of the Journal. This is how he depicted the society's founding: "I had been corresponding with James West of San Rafael for some time concerning an organized effort toward publishing a cactus magazine in America, and West was as anxious as I to see it launched, but neither of us could find the person or publisher who would finance the project. In the fall of 1928 I made a visit to Dr. Arthur D. Houghton's home to chat about cacti, and I told him of West's and my ambition. He suggested that we call a meeting of all the collectors we knew at his home in San Fernando for the purpose of organizing a cactus society and to publish a magazine. With this suggestion, I appointed him president pro-tem and in return he appointed me secretary pro-tem, and the next day I mailed out 40 letters to every collector I knew in California. Following is a copy of the letter: 'Your presence is requested at the rare plant gardens of Dr. Arthur D. Houghton in San Fernando, California, Sunday, January 6th, 1929, at 2 P. M. for the purpose of organizing a Cactus Society. Bring any other cactus collectors who may be interested. G. A. Frick, Sec'y. Pro-Tem.' "Responded to this call were 110 people of whom 39 paid $1.00 to become charter members. Speeches were made by James West, Dr. Houghton and Col. Perrie Kewen. The wind was raw and cold so the meeting only lasted about one hour but that was long enough to give birth to the Cactus and Succulent Society of America." When the first issue of the Journal appeared in July 1929, Frick, with a crested saguaro, appeared on the cover.

With his large collection of euphorbias, Frick was one of the first specialists. By 1933, he had more than 200 species and varieties, including several unnamed hybrids that he created. His collection was housed in four greenhouses and only a few were
planted in the open ground. He won first prize at the cactus shows every time he exhibited under competition. In November 1929 he was pictured in the Los Angeles Times as the sweepstakes winner at the Pasadena show. Frick was a prolific writer, contributing 28 articles, mostly about euphorbias, for the Journal. In 1931 N. E. Brown named Euphorbia frickiana for Frick, but just a few years later the taxon was transferred to E. pseudoglobosa Marloth.

Frick made his way through hard work and amassed quite an empire with a paper towel supply business; also he was a leading paper merchant. His euphorbia collection attracted Alain White, who wrote The Succulent Euphorbieae with Allen Dyer and Boyd Sloane. Wrote the authors: "G. A. Frick who has done much to stimulate general interest in euphorbias by the founding of the International Euphorbia Society and the Euphorbia Review, for the constant encouragement he has given to our work by his loan of books and very generous gifts of plants and photographs, and his assistance at virtually every step in the progress of the books." Frick's picture is included in the first few pages of volume 1 of The Succulent Euphorbieae. He edited and published the short-lived (10 issues, January 1935 through April 1937) The Euphorbia Review as well as contributing five articles to it.

In the late 1960s, Frick moved to Goleta, California. As his retirement avocation, he collected talking machines. He and his son assembled the largest collection of phonographs in the world. Additionally, they manufactured "Morning Glory" horns and shipped them all over the world. Frick was 96 in 1973; I could find no further references about him.

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