PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

GORDON ROWLEY-WUNDERKIND
OF THE SUCCULENT WORLD

In my opinion, the succulent world has never seen another person comparable to Gordon Rowley. He is indeed an international treasure, and succulent plant hobbyists have been very fortunate to benefit from this exceptionally talented man. His virtues are endless, and, adds Gordon, "So are my faults." We can be most thankful for his books, articles, and leadership. And there is no way to beat his keen sense of humor.

Gordon Douglas Rowley was born in London on July 31, 1921. He graduated from the Lower School of John Lyon, Harrow-on-the-Hill, in 1938. His B.Sc. degree in botany was earned in 1942 at the University of London, King's College. Because of World War II, the university had to be evacuated to Bristol to escape the air raids. Says Gordon, "We were bombed out twice, and sat finals with fire engines roaring past the windows and charred flecks of black settling on the exam papers."

From 1948 to 1961 he worked at the John Innes Horticultural Institution as founder and keeper of the National Rose Species Collection; five dictionaries carry his commentary on the genus Rosa. A major contribution was his editing of the facsimile edition of Pierre J. Redout's masterpiece Les Roses, published in four folio volumes between 1974 and 1976. Remarks Gordon, "The first half of my working life succulents were strictly for spare-time amusement only."

Gordon taught horticultural botany at Reading University from 1961 to his retirement in 1981. He purchased a house in Reading in 1968 and called it "Cactusville." Says Gordon, "It is a bachelor's paradise and a housewife's nightmare." His phenomenal book collection, the finest and most complete of its kind in the world, fills two rooms. His favorite book is his copy of Richard Bradley's History of Succulent Plants, the very first one on this subject, which once belonged to James Justice and contains his list of the first succulent collection in Scotland in 1730. Says Gordon, "My library was amassed largely in the 1950s when books were cheap—even splendid old herbals and journal runs." He maintains his succulent collection in a 24-foot greenhouse; semi-hardy succulents are planted outside his home in the front garden.

Highly rewarding were his field trips to the U.S. and Mexico in 1968, 1974 and 1983, and Africa in 1971 because he observed how succulent plants grow in habitat. A staunch conservationist, Gordon advocated conservation since the first International Organization for Succulent Plant Research (IOS) Congress was held in Reading in 1973.

In 1939 he acquired Herman Jacobsen's Succulent Plants and John Borg's Cacti. Thus began his world class library on succulent plant literature. After obtaining some copies of the CSSA Journal, he began writing letters to some of the eminent cactophiles, including Scott Haselton, Howard Gates, William T. Marshall, and Reid Moran. They replied and often sent plants and slides as well. Says Gordon, "Little did I dream that I would one day meet some of these celebrities."

He has made substantial contributions to encyclopedias and symposia, has served as editor of various botanical publications, and has written over 300 articles. In 1959 Gordon published his first book, Flowering Succulents. But that was only the beginning. By the end of the 1970s, he had turned quite prolific, authoring Illustrated

He served as president of the African Succulent Plant Society (ASPS) from 1966 to 1976, and the British Cactus and Succulent Society from 1983 onwards. He was named a CSSA Fellow in 1974. The citation read, "Author and translator of many publications of succulent literature; organizer and editor for the Repertorium Plantarum Succulentarum" Gordon is also a Trustee of the Succulent Plant Trust.

The Veitch Memorial Medal of the Royal Horticultural Society, London, was presented to him in 1981 "for services to horticulture." In 1982 the IOS awarded Gordon the venerated "Cactus d'Or" for having edited the annual Repertorium Plantarum Succulentarum from 1952 to 1982.

Another prime Rowley interest is classical music, and the collecting urge extends to CDs, LPs, and tapes. He has a penchant for pre-World War II and silent films and now collects them on videotape. He delved into filmmaking, still photography, and slide-tape lectures and one of his 16 mm movies Cactus Polonaised was recently revived on British television. Says Gordon, "My unfulfilled ambitions are too numerous to list, but I would love to flower Selenicereus grandiflorus before I die—it has been totally ungrowable so far!"

Seven taxa have been named for him. Among the cacti are Lobivia rowleyi Ito (1957), Pygmaeocereus rowleyanus Backeb erg (1962), Echinopsis rowleyi Friedrich (1974), and epicactus 'Gordon Rowley'Innes (1977). In the Crassulaceae are Aeonium x rowleyi Bramwell (1973) and Greenovium rowleyi Bramwell (1973). The Compositae are represented by Senecio rowleyanus Jacobsen (1968). •

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