



Charles B. Beck

March 26, 1927 - February 26, 2024

Charles B. Beck, Professor Emeritus of Botany, passed away on February 26, 2024 at the age of 96. Born on March 26, 1927 to the late Charles B. Beck and Elizabeth L. (Coleman) Beck, Charles graduated as valedictorian from high school in his home town, Green Bay, Virginia. At age 17 he enlisted in an Army Specialized Training Reserve Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, which consisted largely of a year of instruction in physics and mathematics. After basic training in August of 1945, he was shipped to Okinawa, Japan, where he served in the 63rd anti-aircraft battalion for the following year.

After completing a B.A. degree, with a major in botany, at the University of Richmond, Charles entered a doctoral program at Cornell University, followed by a post-doctoral fellowship at Glasgow University in Scotland. In 1955 he accepted a faculty position at the University of Michigan, ultimately becoming chairman of the Department of Botany. Other administrative positions included one year as Director of the Museum of Paleontology, and a half-time appointment in the Department of Geology. His major teaching and research interests were plant anatomy and paleobotany. After retiring from U-M in 1991, he continued his research and also wrote a textbook, *An Introduction to Plant Structure and Development*.

In 2013 the Botanical Society of America selected him as a recipient of their Merit Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Botanical Sciences. Their

description of his career states: “Dr. Charles Beck is a distinguished paleontologist who has made remarkable discoveries in the history of land plants. He discovered that the fern-like leaves of the genus *Archaeopteris* were in fact borne on a tree (*Callixylon*) with the anatomy of a gymnosperm....One of the people who nominated Dr. Beck for the award quoted Henry Andrews in saying that this discovery ‘blazed a rough trail through a dark forest where no recognizable path existed before.’ ”

In addition to his scientific pursuits, Charles was an avid gardener, photographer, and classical music enthusiast who regularly attended concerts by the Ann Arbor Symphony. He played the violin and sang in the choir at the First Baptist Church in Ann Arbor, where he met his future wife Janice, who was the organist. They married on December 21, 1961. He traveled the world both for work and in support of his wife’s career as a concert organist, assisting her with concerts in many of the great cathedrals of England and Europe.

A loving and supportive husband and father, Charles is survived by his wife of 62 years, Janice (Milburn) Beck, two daughters, Ann Beck and Sara Beck, a son-in-law, Craig Roderick (married to Sara), and his sister, Martha (Beck) Redd and her family.

Cremation has taken place under the care of Robison-Bahnmilller Funeral Home. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions in Charles’ name may be sent to the Humane Society of Huron Valley, [https:// www.hshv.org](https://www.hshv.org) or the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra, <https://a2so.com>. To leave a memory you have of Charles or to sign his guestbook, please visit www.rbfhsaline.com.

Tribute Wall

GR

“Charlie Beck's conceptualization of progymnosperms as the putative ancestors of seed plants was one of the most insightful advancements in our understanding plant evolution for the late 20th century, but as a graduate student I was more impressed by his studies of plant vascular architecture. When I wrote to him in 1968, introducing myself and asking questions about facets of his primary vascular system work that I didn't understand, he graciously responded to my query with additional insights and the pronouncement that I had asked some questions that he could not answer. That was an unexpectedly honest and enlightening response, but it wasn't until I had the pleasure of meeting him in person that I realized what a gracious gentleman he really was. Over the next 40-50 years he continued to impress me with his genuine warmth and exceptional intellect. I have had the honor of considering him to be both a friend and long-distance mentor, who inspired a generation of plant paleontologists to both the finest in scholarship and honorable behavior, and share with his family and friends the profound sadness of his loss. He will be missed badly by us all.

Gar Rothwell

Ohio University and Oregon State University

Gar Rothwell - March 12, 2024 at 12:56 AM

EK

“ Charles B. Beck was a monumental figure in rreserach, whose contributions to paleobotany illuminated our understanding of ancient ecosystems. His pioneering work not only advanced the field but also inspired countless others in their scientific pursuits. We deeply value and honor Beck's enduring legacy in research of fossil plants.

*My condolences to his family,
Evelyn Kustatscher, Italy*

Evelyn Kustatscher - March 11, 2024 at 10:15 AM

LE

“ I have very fond memories of speaking with Charles at St. John's Episcopal Church in Detroit when Janice served as organist. My condolences to Janice and family for your loss. His was a well-lived life. Linda Etter

Linda Etter - March 06, 2024 at 04:28 PM

SB

“ 1 file added to the album Good times



Sara Beck - March 06, 2024 at 11:45 AM

LS

“ *Dear Janice, Ann, Sara and Families,
You are in our family's thoughts at this time of which there is never
enough. Such respect we have for Charles and all of his
accomplishments. He will be truly missed. Sincerely, The Suits
Family*

Lynn Marie Suits - March 05, 2024 at 09:01 AM