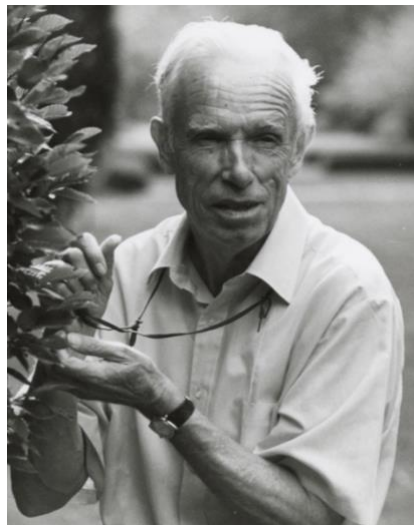


CHARLIE DEAM – REMINESCENCES

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF
THE PUBLICATION OF *FLORA OF INDIANA*

1990 (November 2) PRESENTATION by **FLOYD SWINK**



With hornbeam, circa 1995, courtesy MOR

PROLOGUE: Floyd Allen Swink was an acclaimed educator as well as a phenomenal naturalist. A Villa Park (IL) native, he was employed at the Morton Arboretum (Lisle, IL) for nearly four decades. During his MOR tenure, which started in 1960, he developed a national reputation in part due to his remarkable ornithological and botanical knowledge. As testament, he instructed and served as poisonous plant expert at the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy, that is until six years later when the administration discovered Floyd had no college degree – just brilliant, and a world-class talent. His special and unique training (albeit certificateless) was guided by two world-renowned Field Museum botanists (Paul Carpenter Stanley and Julian Steyermark) who recognized his incredible work ethic and extraordinary ability. The botanist they produced was the highest quality. Yet Floyd, since only a high school diploma, was disdained by the academic community (credential snobbery) even though most of those degreed experts fell well short of his mastery and output – some of the snubbing no doubt due to jealousy.

His Ph.D. was a late life (1995) honorary degree. The few university types who did appreciate and respect Floyd included giants like Robert Mohlenbrock and Edward Voss. Swink's size was also an impediment. He was perhaps 5'4" and 120 lbs, yet intellectually enormous. And, as everyone fortunate enough to have spent time with Floyd came to realize, he had few if any plant ID or birding peers, was a character, a prolific punster and an ace editor. A reverent gentle man with amazing recall whom only fools underestimated. Floyd went on to author four editions of the praised *Plants of the Chicago Region* – the last one published in the fall of 1994, co-authored with Gerould Wilhelm, with significant help from their talented assistant Linda Masters. Finally, Floyd deserves as much credit as anyone for helping save what was left of the unmatched Indiana Dunes ecosystem.

THE PRESENTATION: Floyd was asked to talk about the great Hoosier botanist Charlie Deam with the Plant Taxonomy Section of the Indiana Academy of Science at their 106th annual meeting. Like Swink, Deam was degreeless. Mike Homoya (IDNR botanist) arranged the AV and introduced Floyd that Friday morning. The audience was standing-room only in a classroom at Manchester College, in north central Indiana. The room could not hold all the attendees thus the back door was propped open so individuals positioned outside the room might have a chance to at least hear the presentation. Only three slides were used by this extraordinary little man – nor were more needed. Ever the showman and a gifted orator, the legendary Floyd Swink with his white pompadour, typical attire and marvelous mind was the show. His friend and colleague Gerould Wilhelm accompanied him that glorious autumn day, once again serving as chauffeur on their trip from suburban west Chicago. Floyd was 69 and still in his prime when he gave the presentation. He died in 2000 at age 79. Deam, who was quite a character too, died in 1953 (age 87).

For more, see *Plain Ol' Charlie Deam: Pioneer Botanist* (Kriebel, 1994) and *A Congenial Fellowship: A Botanical Correspondence Between Charles C. Deam and Floyd A. Swink* (Mohar, 2000)

REMEMBERED ATTENDEES: John Bacone, Lee Casebere, James Cope, Rebecca Dolan, Cloyce Hedge*, Stan Hokason, Mike Homoya, Richard Jensen, Lewis Johnson*, Richard Maxwell, Bill McKnight, Bill Overlease*, Tom Post*, Paul Rothrock, Byron Torke* and Gerould Wilhelm*
(there were many others, >2×) (*) questioners

- thanks to John Bacone without whom this 35-minute historical treasure would not exist – converted from VHS tape
- this page was composed and posted 35-years after the event (courtesy Bill McKnight, Mad Botanist Publications)