

RAY COLLETT

He planted the seed



UC SANTA CRUZ ARBORETUM FOUNDER EULOGIZED AT MEMORIAL



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL PHOTOS

UC Santa Cruz Arboretum Director Brett Hall eulogizes Ray Collett at a memorial Sunday for the arboretum's founding director, who died Feb. 22.

Founding director died in February

B10-C

By CATHY KELLY

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SANTA CRUZ — Visionary is a descriptor that cropped up frequently Sunday among the 100 or so people who gathered in a grove at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum to remember founding director Ray Collett.

Collett, a founding faculty member and professor emeritus of natural history, died Feb. 22. He was 79.

In the 1960s, the UC Berkeley graduate oversaw the conversion of about 130 acres of rough pasture land into a horticultural site renowned for its collections of plants from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, as well as California natives. He is credited with introducing many popular ornamental plants to the nursery industry, including the "Swan River" cultivar of the Australian blue



Friends and colleagues of Ray Collett gather in a UC Santa Cruz Arboretum eucalyptus grove Sunday to remember the founding director.

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hibiscus (*Alyogyne huegelii*) and the "Hurricane Point" cultivar of the California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*).

Sunday's memorial was in the Austrian section, on a beautiful spring afternoon.

It was informal, with friends and former students and colleagues sharing their memories of Collett.

Arboretum Director Brett Hall, who began working with Collett as a student in 1975, said Collett was a visionary who set out to develop a garden to investigate plants' origin and development.

Collett was a popular professor and mentor who also taught a range of classes, from horticulture to meteorology to botany to cartooning, Hall said.

And though Collett could be shy, he was vigorous as a professor and would "zero in on you with those beautiful blue eyes" when you asked a question, Hall said.

Hal Hyde of Watsonville, a former assistant chancellor and supporter of the university since its founding, said the arboretum site was chosen before much of the campus was laid out. It began

when a Hollister man needed a home for an impressive collection of eucalyptus trees, he said. That was in 1964.

Collett came about 18 months later.

"He was a somewhat reticent man who became a wonderful leader," Hyde said. "I consider him the John Muir of this campus. This became his love and he made a major impact on all of this and on the campus. We are all very deeply indebted to Ray."

Several of Collett's former students spoke Sunday, recalling the influence he had on their lives.

John Carothers, a Cabrillo College biology instructor, said Collett employed the now-popular "active learning" style, simply having students learn by experience rather than by listening to a lecture.

"He was extremely active in the field and students sometimes dreaded his hikes, but we are all very grateful for all he crammed into his life and all he shared with us," Carothers said.

Julie Brown said she first encountered Collett in a letter he wrote to a former chancellor, years ago, which she was asked to translate from Old English and English Script.

The gist of the letter, she said, was that because the chancellor didn't seem to understand English, Collett would try Old English.

Later, he responded immediately when she found a flower she had never seen in a field off Empire Grade Road, and he was able to identify it and show her where it grew on campus.

Collett spent his last days at the arboretum surrounded by the plant collections he helped establish. He was under hospice care in Hall's home on the arboretum grounds.

Collett received several honors, including the American Horticultural Society's 1986 Professional Citation, the California Horticultural Society's Annual Award for 1997, and the California Association of Nurserymen's 1997 Research Award.

Among the unusual plants he added to the arboretum's collection was *Amborella trichopoda*, collected in 1975 from the South Pacific island of New Caledonia by a pair of UCSC students. In 1999, when a genetic analysis identified *Amborella* as the most primitive living flowering plant, the UCSC Arboretum was the only botanic garden in the country with living specimens of it.

Collett earned his bachelor's degree in chemistry and doctorate in geography from UC Berkeley. He served as arboretum director from 1965 through 1997.

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