THE ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY OF I.A.P.T.

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“Our society is relatively so young that there are no traditions worthy of the name and we scarcely have a history . . . .” With these words Reed Rollins started his address as president of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy at the 1959 International Botanical Congress, held in Montreal (1). Reed was then at the end of his presidency and he had vigorously supported I.A.P.T. since his appointment as vice-president at the founding meeting at Stockholm on Tuesday 18 July 1950. He would continue his support up to the present and would become the only plant taxonomist who served on the council of I.A.P.T. for the full period of 1950–1981. Reed’s formal farewell to academic responsibilities and the present issue of Taxon published in honor of him, provide us with an opportunity to look back at the origins and early history of I.A.P.T. and Taxon.

Strictly speaking, I.A.P.T. had no forerunners. Closest to what is now I.A.P.T. came from the “Freie Vereinigung botanischer Systematiker und Pflanzengeographen” [Free Association of botanical systematists and plant-geographers]. This association was founded in Berlin in 1903 at the invitation of a committee, consisting of P. F. A. Ascherson, C. L. U. Dammer, A. Engler, E. F. Gilg, T. Gürke, E. Hieronymus, G. Lindau, K. M. Schumann, I. Urban and O. Warburg. A circular, dated “Berlin, Kgl. bot. Museum, den 25. Mai 1903” invited systematists to join and to meet (annually) in the university cities of Central Europe to promote systematics by “lectures, demonstrations and private talk.” The enterprise was essentially German and inspired by Engler, then in his heyday.

The first meeting took place 16–19 September 1903, at Berlin, under the chairmanship of Engler; 84 systematists “from all over the world” had applied. We have, alas, not [yet] found a membership list, but the circular was certainly sent out beyond the German borders, because the copy seen by us is at Geneva. The reports and proceedings of the thirteen meetings (they would now be called symposia) held between 1903 and 1918 were published as “Beiblätter” to Engler’s Botanische Jahrbücher. Judging from these proceedings the meetings were very interesting, dealing with all current problems of plant systematics and regularly reporting on the great publications of the Engler era such as the Pflanzenreich, the Natürliche Pflanzenfamilien and the Vegetation der Erde. Most of the participants were German, Austrian or Swiss; it is clear that the Society remained distinctly regional. Engler remained chairman through all thirteen meetings; after 18 years we lose the trail of this society which united for some fifteen years all the great men of Central European systematics and plant geography (2). Its role and significance will have to be discussed within the context of the Engler era rather than in that of international cooperation in taxonomy.

A truly international society of botanists, not restricted therefore to systematics, was the International Association of Botanists better known under its French name Association Internationale des Botanistes, founded in Geneva in 1901 by a number of botanists, convened by Robert Chodat at Geneva 6–8 August 1901. The Association had, according to its statutes, only one goal: “the progress of scientific bota-

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ny." This goal was to be obtained in first instance by "the publication of a bibliographical journal, the setting up of a library and by facilitating the distribution of study and demonstration material." The Association acquired the rights to publish the "Botanisches Centralblatt" as its bibliographical journal; its activities were mainly in the hands of its secretary, the Dutch botanist J. P. Lotsy. The association was thoroughly international and was held together by the receipt of the issues of the Botanisches Centralblatt. It became the forerunner of the Botanical Section of the International Union of Biological Sciences rather than of I.A.P.T. (3).

The first movement towards a real international organization of taxonomists and the setting up of an International Bureau of Plant Taxonomy started in the United States during the nineteen-twenties. These two ideas, a bureau and an association were put forward by H. M. Hall and E. D. Merrill, respectively. It is therefore fair to say that the original idea of I.A.P.T. came from the United States. The proposal for an International Bureau surfaced at the International Botanical Congress of 1930, held in Cambridge, England (4). Hall spoke at a discussion on "a proposed international bureau of plant taxonomy and on herbarium administration." The task of the Bureau would be the preparation of a finding-list of type-specimens and the setting up of an office to "assemble and transmit information as to location and means of consulting specimens and literature, . . . ." and "to direct workers to sources of information concerning specimens and literature . . . ." This was, in a nutshell, what I.A.P.T. started doing in 1950.

It is not surprising that this proposal came from a California botanist. Hall was the heart and soul of what became the California school of new systematics immortalized by the group assembled by him which is now known as "Clausen, Keck and Hiesey." The new impetus given to systematics by Hall and his co-workers made them acutely aware of the problem of the old collections, types and literature being mainly held by Western European institutions at a great distance from their own activities (5). The initiative by the modern and imaginative systematist Hall to lend support to the traditional base of systematics is reminiscent of the support given by Darwin to Kew in order to promote the setting up of a new index to species names of phanerogams, an enterprise which grew into the Index kewensis.

Hall's proposal included also the setting up of a service to provide photographs of type specimens and the establishment of one or more international institutes for systematic botany. In view of the complexity of the proposal, the Cambridge group decided to start in a modest way by setting up an "International Standing Committee to deal with urgent taxonomic needs" which was to secure the necessary financial assistance. L. Diels was to act as recorder. The other members were A. D. Cotton, R. Fries, H. M. Hall, R. Maire, E. D. Merrill and J. Ramsbottom (6).

Apparently the securing of the "necessary financial assistance" was not altogether successful and no action is known to have been taken by the Committee except at the next Congress which was held in Amsterdam in 1935.

At Amsterdam E. D. Merrill, then director of the New York Botanical Garden, spoke on botanical cooperation (7). The abstract of Merrill's paper given in the Proceedings of the Congress runs as follows: "A general consideration of the development of cooperation among botanists and botanical institutions in the field of taxonomy and a plea for its greater development. The points discussed include the desirability of the formation of an international organization of taxonomists; the establishment and support of a publication devoted exclusively to this field; . . . ." Merrill added several other wishes such as "checking references in rare publications," "photographing of type specimens" and "inter-institutional cooperation in . . . . botanical exploration . . . ." A. S. Hitchcock of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., strongly supported Merrill's proposal and A. D. Cotton suggested the reappointment of the "Committee for urgent taxonomic needs" (8). This committee was now charged with the compilation of a new phytography containing a survey of the collections represented in the larger herbaria of the world. There were other goals such as the preparation of a new dictionary of botanical terminology. A
scheme to photograph type specimens was to be postponed until the next Congress "as the means of most institutes are restricted at the present time." A strong recommendation was made to photograph the specimens of the Linnaean type specimens.

The "Standing Committee" was reappointed and this time a secretary was designated. A young botanist from Utrecht, J. Lanjouw, was the fortunate choice of the Congress and it actually proved to be of decisive importance for the future implementation of the ideas of Hall, Hitchcock and Merrill. Lanjouw set out to work on what has now become the *Index herbariorum.* A list of herbaria was drawn up, standard acronyms were assigned and the compilation of data on herbaria and collections was started.

In his work Lanjouw had the active and imaginative support of Frans Verdoorn, editor and publisher of *Chronica botanica* and secretary of the botanical section of IUBS. Verdoorn (10) published a call for international cooperation among herbaria and taxonomists in which he pointed at the success of the International Society of Plant Anatomists. "The income from personal members and institutions or society-members would be sufficient to support a bureau and its publications." He added "it is now time to act, steps could be taken to found an International Society of Plant Taxonomists at the Stockholm Conference." This Conference, actually the next International Botanical Congress, was foreseen for 1940. However, World War II intervened and time for international taxonomy came to a halt.

The war lasted five or six years; its aftermath, however, added further delay in scientific progress. By 1946 plans were made to hold the Stockholm Congress in 1950. J. Lanjouw, H. J. Lam and A. A. Pulle, realized "that it would be difficult to pick up the threads of international contact, which had been cut so roughly in 1939, and . . . thought it would be wise to have a small international conference to be held about two years before the congress . . ." (11). With the help of the secretary of I.U.B.S., the Dutch geneticist M. J. Sirks, the *Utrecht Symposium on Botanical Nomenclature and Taxonomy* was held at Utrecht, The Netherlands, 14–19 June 1948 (12). In preparation of that Conference, Lanjouw prepared a text "on the need for an international society of plant taxonomists," which was sent to a number of colleagues around the world and which served as a working document for the Conference. The other matters dealt with by the Conference were exclusively nomenclatural: several sets of proposals to amend the 1930 "Rules" (amended 1935) (13) had already been received and were the subject of a discussion which prepared the way for the formal nomenclature meetings at Stockholm from which arose the new "Stockholm Code" (14).

In his memorandum (11) Lanjouw combined some of the elements of H. M. Hall’s *International Bureau for Plant Taxonomy* of 1935, Merrill’s and Verdoorn’s idea of a Society of 1935 and 1939 as well as the activities of the "Standing Committee." The Conference accepted the idea of founding what was then still called the International Society of Plant Taxonomists which was to undertake not less than twelve major tasks such as the compilation of an *Index Herbariorum*, the establishment of an "International Journal for Plant Taxonomy for the publication of monographic studies," the establishment of a monthly journal for publication of new species, a permanent international committee for nomenclature, and the publication of a new up-to-date edition of Pritzel’s Thesaurus.

The way to do this would indeed be to set up a permanent *International Bureau for Plant Taxonomy* which would be financed through the income of the Association. This Bureau should be such that "the director and the scientific members of its staff need contribute part of their time to that work, so that they may continue their own scientific work . . . ." Lanjouw wanted no bureaucrats but regular scientists to do the work in order to keep the respect of the botanical community.

The support of the Conference resulted in a successful action at the 1950 Stockholm Congress. A meeting was held which resulted in the foundation of the *International Association for Plant Taxonomy* (I.A.P.T.). Among the first to register as
members at the end of that meeting of 18 July 1950 were E. D. Merrill, R. C. Rollins, Ch. Baehni, W. Robyns, H. Humbert, J. Mattfeld and W. B. Turrill (15). Charles Baehni was elected president, Reed Rollins vice-president and Lanjouw secretary-treasurer. Lanjouw was charged to set up an office in Utrecht, to be called the International Bureau for Plant Taxonomy and Nomenclature. He could accept that assignment because the University of Utrecht had in advance agreed to provide housing and other facilities at the Botanical Museum and Herbarium and, of crucial importance, to provide a special position for an extra staff member to take care of the daily work and to develop the I.A.P.T. activities (16). Back in Utrecht Lanjouw proceeded with the setting up of the staff of his Bureau. The scientist asked to take charge of the daily affairs is now one of the authors of this account; on 1 November 1950 it was possible to attract an administrative secretary, Miss W. Keuken, who was to stay with I.A.P.T. until 30 June 1980.

A circular letter was sent to taxonomists asking them to join; the text is partly reproduced in Taxon (16). It is interesting to note that the following publications were foreseen: (1) Taxon, a news bulletin, (2) Forum phytotaxonomicum, a scientific journal, (3) Regnum vegetabile, a series of handbooks. The name “Taxon” was decided upon after the Stockholm Congress. In the early documents the name “nuntius phytotaxonomius” is used for the newsletter. A vivid exchange of ideas took place on this matter between Lanjouw and Verdoorn. The latter did not like the name “Forum” for the large journal and proposed “Engleria” instead. Several other names were proposed, but ultimately the Utrecht group (C. E. B. Bremekamp, J. Lanjouw and F. A. Stafleu) agreed on “Taxon.” H. J. Lam had successfully proposed to the Stockholm Congress to replace “taxonomic group” in the rules of nomenclature by “taxon.” In view of Merrill’s advice to use one-word journal titles, “Taxon” seemed the right word for the news bulletin. The “Forum phytotaxonomicum” was never realized as such; Taxon moved in the direction of the combination of a newsletter and a scientific journal. The first issue came out in November 1951 and with it the early history of I.A.P.T. ended and the present situation started.

We do not want to pass here from pre-history to history. Reed Rollins himself wrote in 1959 (1) “‘Many of these accomplishments are well known to you and I shall not recite them here.’ There is, however, one point that should be made: Reed Rollins made a firm plea at Montreal for I.A.P.T. to move ahead beyond the immediate practical necessities of ‘nomenclature, codes, indexes and transient news items.’” His address was in essence a plea for I.A.P.T. and especially for Taxon “to broaden the scope of our relationships to the field of taxonomy and embrace the whole of it as an area of activity.” This is what happened and we can personally testify that it was Reed’s injunction at Montreal that made us move ahead.

A simple look at the size and contents of Taxon after 1959 shows that his advice did not go unheeded. Reed did much for I.A.P.T. as vice-president, president, council member, chairman of the nomenclature sessions, member of the editorial committee and as representative of I.A.P.T. in the United States. Not the least of his achievements was, however, to point the way for the future of Taxon as a journal “devoted to systematic and evolutionary biology with an emphasis on botany.”

Notes

(2) A copy of the three page “Einladung zur Gründung einer Freien Vereinigung der Vertreter der systematischen Botanik und Pflanzengeographie” by P. F. A. Ascherson et al. is at G. The founding meeting of 16–19 September 1903 is reported upon in Beibl. 73 of the Botanische Jahrbücher (23, 1903), p. [1]–80; the constitution of the Association is published on p. 81–83. Aims and activities are described as follows:

[Art. 2]: Der Zweck dieser Vereinigung liegt darin, dass den Vertretern dieser Richtungen in der Botanik Gelegenheit gegeben wird, sich kennen zu lernen, zu belehren und


The society had only regular members. Any botanist proposed by two other members and accepted by the council could become a member. The annual fee was 3 Mark.

(3) For a report by A. Beauverd on the first meeting of the Association Internationale des Botanistes, held at Geneva, 6–8 Aug 1901, see Bull. Herb. Boissier ser. 2. 1: 893–912. 1901. The first council consisted of K. Goebel president, F. A. Bower, vice-president, J. P. Lotsy, secretary, and J. W. Goethart, treasurer. The Botanisches Centralblatt was to be bought for 37,500 Marks, a sum to be covered by the issue of bonds and by a loan from the publishers Brill at Leiden.

(4) F. T. Brooks and T. F. Chipp, Fifth International Botanical Congress, Cambridge, 16–23 August, 1930. Report of Proceedings. Cambridge 1931, on p. 544–553: “Discussion on a proposed International Bureau of Plant Taxonomy and on herbarium administration,” introduced by H. Hall with a “proposal for an International Bureau of Plant Taxonomy.” The basic statement that the function of such a bureau would be to direct workers to sources of information concerning specimens and literature and also, when feasible, itself to supply this information, became indeed the guideline for the activities of I.A.P.T. The information concerning specimens was published in Index herbariorum, and that on literature e.g. in Taxonomic literature.

(5) The response at the Cambridge Congress in the above-mentioned (4) discussion was lukewarm. A. D. Cotton from Kew said that Hall’s proposals had been discussed with “leading British botanists” and that “although appreciation of his efforts on behalf of international research was fully recognized but as far as could be ascertained there was no demand from European or American [sic] botanists for the establishment of a bureau.”

(6) F. T. Brooks and T. F. Chipp l.c. (see note 4), p. 18: “That until such a time as there is an appropriate standing International Botanical Organization this Congress is in favour of appointing an International Standing Committee to deal with urgent taxonomic needs and to secure the necessary financial assistance.” Proposed by L. Diels on behalf of Section T, Taxonomy and Nomenclature, seconded by E. D. Merrill and carried “nem. con.”


(8) M. J. Sirks, l.c. p. 320–321. Hitchcock used the opportunity to ask for support of his effort to gather data on the location of type specimens. Two lists were issued: 1934 and 1935, see F. A. Stafleu and R. S. Cowan, Taxonomic literature, ed. 2, no. 2819. When A. D. Cotton suggested the reappointment of a Committee for urgent taxonomic needs, B. P. G. Hochreutiner said that the Americans were teaching the Europeans a lesson in liberalism.

(9) The last wish was fulfilled in several ways; the Linnaean herbarium is now for instance available on microfiches issued by the Interdocumentation Company, B.V., the Netherlands. For the complete text of the proposals see M. J. Sirks, l.c., p. 406.

(10) F. Verdoorn, International cooperation among herbaria and taxonomists, Chronica botanica 5(2/3): 140–142. 1939. Among the tasks to be undertaken are the further compilation of an Index herbariorum, and especially the publication of a supplement to Pritzel’s Thesaurus, as well as the photographic reproduction of the handwriting of important authors. Verdoorn stated that an International Taxonomic Bureau was needed, as had been stated by Hall, to undertake these tasks. An appeal for a new Thesaurus literaturae
botanicae had been made by W. Rothmaler in Chronica botanica 4(6): 515-517. 1938.

"Es ist wohl jetzt an der Zeit, an die Herausgabe einer modernen botanischer Bibliographie zu denken. Hier ist eine ausserordentliche fühlbare Lücke auszufüllen." He continued by stating that a supplement to Pritzel would be insufficient because of all the additions for the period covered by that Thesaurus as well as because of the important problem of providing more precise information on dates of publication. The new Thesaurus was to present as good a picture of botany as possible. Independently paged treatments published in serials such as Fedde's "Beihefte" should be included. The entries should indicate the nomenclatural status of the names in the works with respect to the rules of nomenclature; acceptable abbreviations of titles and author's names should be proposed. Rothmaler's wishes, as repeated here, are almost met for taxonomy by our Taxonomic Literature ed. 2. However, he wanted something even larger, not limited to systematics, and with regional and subject indexes as well as a full treatment of journals. We must confess that Rothmaler's plea for such a new Thesaurus had so far escaped us, but are glad that, thanks to I.A.P.T. some of the wishes of this brilliant botanist can now be met.

(11) J. Lanjouw, On the need for an International Society of Plant Taxonomists, Chronica botanica 12: 55-57. 1950 (part of the publication mentioned in (12).
(15) The lists with the signatures of the founding members are in the I.A.P.T. archives.
(16) The main data, concerning this meeting and the assignments to the new Bureau are given in Taxon 1: 5-6. 1951.