

Memorial Minute for Carl John Burk, May 18, 2023, Faculty Meeting. Written and read by Paulette Peckol, Louise C. Harrington Professor of Biological Sciences.

Carl John Burk passed away on July 1, 2022 in Northampton, MA, at the age of 87. Smith College lost a superb botanist, teacher and naturalist. I knew John for many years—he was Chair of the Department of Biological Sciences when I arrived. Over the years, I greatly admired his depth and breadth of knowledge, his unique sense of humor, and his generosity of spirit.

John was born in Troy, OH, and received his undergraduate degree from Miami University, in OH. He earned his Masters and Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. John joined the faculty of Smith College in 1961, serving for over four decades and retired in 2009 as Elsie Damon Simonds Professor in Life Sciences. He was Chair of Biological Sciences three times. He championed connections, and played a pivotal role in establishing interdisciplinary programs at Smith and the Five Colleges, including Marine Sciences, Public Policy, Environmental Science & Policy, and Landscape Studies.

John's teaching and research interests were diverse and interdisciplinary. He taught Systematics, Plant Ecology, and Biogeography. He taught a course "Conservation of Natural Resources", Fall 1962-- the first College offering on sustainability—clearly, John was a pioneer in teaching about environmental issues. His research focused on plant ecology and human impacts in coastal areas and wetlands. His interests also included historical work about botanic gardens, and he later conducted work with German colleagues. After retirement, he continued scholarly work at Smith until the COVID shutdown. In fact, he co-authored a 2020 article in the prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

John was an engaging, witty speaker, and his Katharine Asher Lecture (1987/88) highlighted research on the changing New England landscapes in a way that was accessible to non-scientists, including his proud parents! He was an avid bird watcher, offering annual "bird walks" for the department. He loved gardening, travel, and history.

John co-authored a book entitled, "Stone walls and sugar maples: an ecology for northeasterners". The sugar maple is a native and important species found in northern forests that is renowned for its sweet syrup, its brilliant fall foliage, and its hard, strong wood. They are a deeply rooted species. Thus, it is fitting that a sugar maple was planted on campus in celebration of John Burk's life and career.

It is also fitting that we remember John at this meeting celebrating Smith College graduates of 2023. His courses and research have engaged 1000s of students directly, and many more indirectly, as those students established themselves in careers. One of my former students posted John's obituary on social media and many of John's former students commented. Here, I share remarks of 4 students:

"I took my first class on my path toward environmental science with Professor Burk. His enthusiasm on weekly field trips was contagious! When I go on hikes with my kids now, I find myself pointing out many of the same things he pointed out on those excursions."

"He was amazing!! Prof Burk agreed to be one of my advisors on my design your own major in 1995 --which was Environmental Science and Policy. He championed my ideas and loved bridging the disciplines. He leaves such a tremendous legacy."

"He was my senior thesis advisor. I learned so much from him. He helped me get my first internship. He ignited passions that have continued my whole life."

And finally- "Professor Burk inspired me to become a naturalist, ecologist and teacher. When I left for graduate school in Alaska, he gave me a western bird book that I still treasure. He was an amazing professor and a kind human."

John leaves his wife Lale and two sons, John and Nicholas.