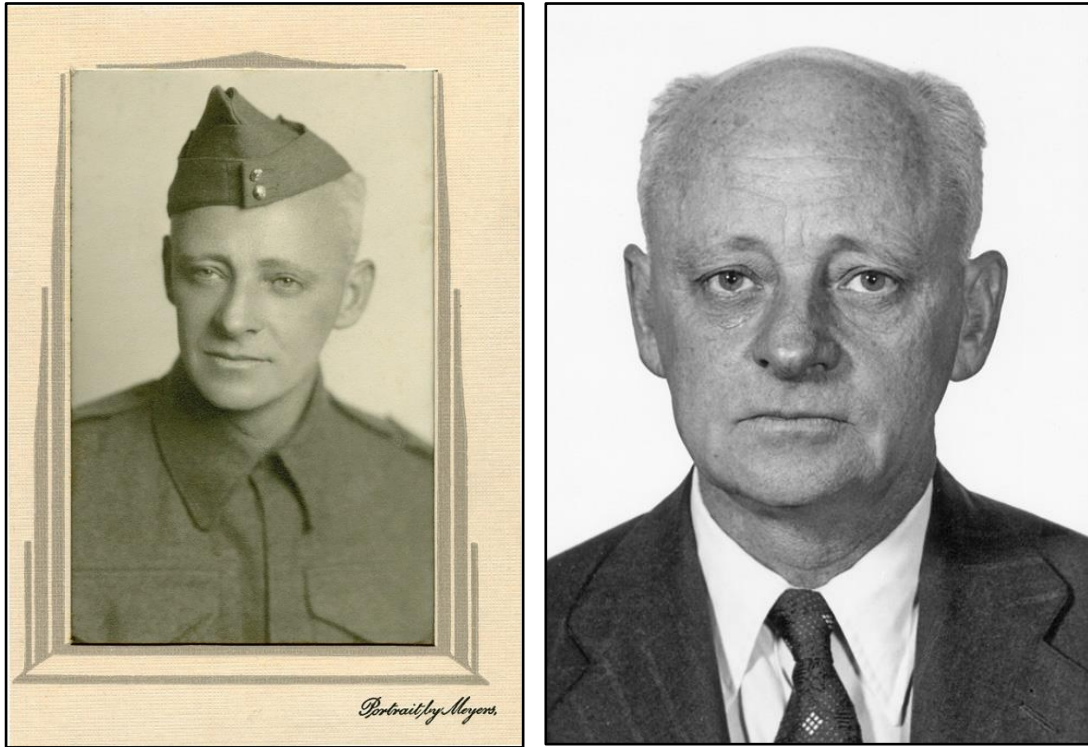


Leonard John Brass (1900-1971), Botanical Collector and Explorer

DEDICATION of the LEONARD J. BRASS HERBARIUM at ARCHBOLD BIOLOGICAL STATION and CURRICULUM VITAE

Compiled by Fred E. Lohrer, Archbold Biological Station, Venus, FL 33960, 20100318, revised 20140904, 20210811
< <https://www.archbold-station.org/documents/publicationsPDF/LJBrass-CV-Dedication.pdf> >



Leonard J. Brass, L-R: ca. 1941, Canadian Army uniform; ca. 1962.

"Leonard J. Brass is undoubtedly the foremost Australian botanical collector of the 20th Century" (Forster 1997)

Len was the heart and soul of those Archbold Expeditions, I really miss him."
(Van Deusen in Musser and Lunde 2009, p. 95.)

Botanical Collector and Explorer

Leonard J. Brass is remembered by curators of major herbaria in Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America as a remarkably productive collector and explorer active mostly in the southwestern Pacific and in northeastern Australia. His meticulously prepared specimens, many including flowers, were accompanied by detailed notes on locality, habitats, and geography, and often with photographs of the collection area (Perry 1971, Van Deusen 1971).

Brass was the sole botanist on nine expeditions (1925-1959) of exploration and collecting, including seven to the southwestern Pacific and two in tropical Africa. He led two Arnold Arboretum Expeditions to New Guinea (1925-26) and the Solomon Islands (1932-33). He was the botanist on three, and leader and botanist on four, Archbold Expeditions (1933-1959) to New Guinea (6) and tropical Australia (1), all sponsored by Richard Archbold and the American Museum of Natural History (Lohrer 2019). He was botanist (1946), and leader (1949-50) on two expeditions to tropical Africa.

His personal catalog numbered 33,357 collections with almost 90% from tropical lands including about 23,300 from New Guinea, and 3,600 from the United States (Brass 1966). The total number of herbarium sheets from his collections probably exceeded 150,000. He published detailed descriptions (usually illustrated with his photographs of habitats and landscapes) of the itinerary, geography, ecology, and plant communities of almost all of the expeditions (see his CV bibliography below). Often he was the first botanist to collect plants in the region he was visiting, and therefore many new species of plants have been described from his collections.

Brass was honored by many plant taxonomists who have named four genera and 232 species of vascular plants for him (IPNI 2021). (The IPNI tally of 250 species named *Brassii* includes duplicate names and the adjusted total is 232. Yet, the Tropicos tally (Tropicos 2021) for *Brassii* species is 221 and the adjusted total is 197.)

- *Brassiantha* (Celastraceae). *B. pentamera*, type collected by L.J. Brass, 1938, Hollandia and vicinity (Smith and Bailey 1941).
- *Brassi dendron* (Lauraceae). *B. fragrans*, type collected by L.J. Brass, #7465, August 1936, Middle Fly River (Allen 1942).
- *Brassiophoenix* (Arecaceae). *B. drymophloeoides* (Burret 1935).
- *Lenbrassia australiana* (Gesneriaceae). *L. Australiana*, type collected by L.J. Brass, 1932. "The name chosen for the new genus **Lenbrassia** is in commemoration of Leonard Brass, whose prodigious botanical explorations in the Southwest Pacific have played a significant role in the advancement of the botany of that area" (Gillett 1974.)

Also, in 2009, a genus of New Guinea mice was named in his honor, **Brassomys** (Rodentia). *B. albidens*, type collected by W.B. Richardson, 14 August 1938, 2800 m, near Lake Habbema (Musser and Lunde 2009, p. 7).

In 1962, he was honored for his contributions to tropical botany by Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, which awarded him an honorary doctorate degree. In 1969, the Association for Tropical Biology elected Brass as a Fellow of the organization, for "his superb field studies in Australia, the Solomon Islands, and especially New Guinea." The award continues, "His incomparable collections, made over a period of many years and paralleled by lucid and perceptive ecological studies, have provided a large part of the documentation of our current knowledge of the flora of New Guinea" (anonymous 1969).

Archbold Biological Station

At Archbold Biological Station, Brass was an Archbold Curator and the resident botanist (1944-1966), living in Dicerandra Cottage when he was not on an expedition. At the Station he created the herbarium, concentrating on collecting vascular plants of the Lake Wales Ridge, especially on, and adjacent to, the Station, and in the Big Cypress region of southwestern Florida. His Florida collections number 2,900 (Brass 1966). He also made special collections of mosses (some from mountains of eastern United States), lichens, and seeds. Brass's extensive field work in south-central Florida made him the resident regional expert, and botanists routinely stopped at the Station and consulted with him about their plans for collecting. He was always generous with his time and knowledge. Locally, Brass was the Archbold voice of science, being in great demand as a speaker about his explorations in tropical lands.

The Leonard J. Brass Herbarium

The Archbold Biological Station's herbarium has been valuable for many succeeding cohorts of botanists and plant ecologists seeking to learn the local flora with its numerous rare and endemic species. Furthermore, many Lake Wales Ridge plant species are now considered threatened or endangered and Brass's collections are of special interest, especially for their locality information, in planning regional preserves. Therefore, to honor the continuing value of the herbarium to research, education, and conservation, on 18 March 2010, the Plant Ecology Program dedicated the Archbold Biological Station's herbarium as the Leonard J. Brass Herbarium and also honored Dorothy Mundell, of Lake Placid, for her two decades of dedicated work in the herbarium, part of it as a volunteer.

Leonard J. Brass, Accolades and Reminiscences

His contributions to palm taxonomy in New Guinea, by Dr. Paul L. Forster, Queensland Herbarium, Australia.

"... a 20th century botanical icon."

"Leonard J. Brass is undoubtedly the foremost Australian botanical collector of the 20th Century ..."

"... his explorations took him to localities previously not botanized. As a consequence his discoveries of new taxa were numerous and his collections were extensively used as type specimens by botanists from the 1930s through to the present. There are over 180 species and genera of vascular plants named for Len Brass, which is perhaps a record for any collector of this century."

*"The collection and preparation of herbarium specimens of palms are often avoided by plant collectors as they are bulky, difficult to process, and often unpleasantly spiny. Brass did not obviously avoid collecting palms. ... A total of 58 palm names from New Guinea and the Solomon Islands is based on type specimens collected by Brass, and of these, one genus, **Brassiophoenix**, and nine species, are named in his honor."* (Forster 1997).

The botanical collector, as remembered by Dr. Lily M. Perry, Herbarium Assistant, Arnold Arboretum, and who processed Brass' collections from four New Guinea Expeditions.

"The scientific world has lost one of its most kindly and unselfishly co-operative members."

"It was a joy to both process and to study Mr. Brass's collections."

The specimens were well chosen, ample, and beautifully prepared; his collection data were both extensive and meticulous. He took great pains with his field notes.

He seemed to be able to remember vividly every plant he had collected and the place he got it.

We remember his charming smile, the interest with which he greeted us, his readiness to help, his remarkable capacity for work and his complete devotion to it. Those of us who knew him and the scientific world are the poorer by his going. (Perry 1971).

His discovery of southern beeches, *Nothofagus*, in New Guinea, by Dr. Cornelis G.G.J. Van Steenis, Director of the National Herbarium of The Netherlands, Leiden University.

*"One of the most remarkable finds of the Third Archbold New Guinea Expedition (1938-39) has been the discovery of extensive forests in New Guinea in which the fagaceous element dominates the framework of the canopy. Representatives of **Nothofagus** are very common among these fagaceous dominants."*

*"This species [**N. brassii**] is named after Mr. L.J. Brass in honor of his unrivaled collections in New Guinea plants in general and of **Nothofagus** in particular."* (Van Steenis 1953). See also (Archbold, et al. 1942).

The field botanist, as remembered by Hobart M. Van Deusen, Archbold Curator of Mammals, Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., and who accompanied Brass on expeditions to Cape York 1958, and New Guinea 1953,1959).

"Among his peers Len was considered the finest field botanist and collector in the history of Australian botany. But Len was more than a collector. He will be remembered not only for his burning ambition to return to the field regularly, but also for the meticulous organization and planning that went into each expedition. One went "bush" to collect and to observe, and his rigorous routine went on seven days a week, month after month." (Van Deusen 1971).

"He was mild-mannered but a very tough field man, worked all day collecting botanical specimens and when not in the forest was at his work table processing the material and recoding his observations. Len was the heart and soul of those Archbold Expeditions, I really miss him." (Van Deusen in Musser and Lunde 2009, p. 95).

The writer; an appreciation by Dr. Guy G. Musser, Archbold Curator of Mammals, Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.

*"In proposing this new genus, **Brassomys**, [Rodentia] we honor the memory of Leonard J. Brass. Through his lucid published summaries of the various expeditions to New Guinea sponsored by Richard Archbold and the American Museum of Natural History, this intelligent, tough field botanist and explorer brought to us a vivid view of the tropical forests, savannahs, and grasslands forming the landscapes of New Guinea."* (Musser and Lunde 2009, p. 7).

Acknowledgements

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See also; Lohrer, F.E. 2007. Richard Archbold (1907-1976), Explorer and Patron of Science: CURRICULUM VITAE. [link](#)

Leonard J. Brass (1900-1971)
CURRICULUM VITAE

Compiled by Fred E. Lohrer, 18 March 2010, from unpublished documents in the Archbold Biological Station Archives.

Born: May 27, 1900, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. *Died:* August 29, 1971, Cairns, Queensland, Australia.

Educated in Queensland schools. Naturalized citizen of the United States, 1947.

Employment and Appointments

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1917-1919 | Herbarium Assistant under C.T. White, Botanic Museum & Herbarium, Department of Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, Queensland. |
| 1920-1924 | Variously as jackaroo, stockman, bookkeeper, on cattle stations, Queensland & Northern Territory. |
| 1925-1926 | In charge of botanical expedition to British New Guinea for Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University. |
| 1926-1932 | Variously employed as bookkeeper or manager at 2 cattle stations in Queensland. |
| 1932-1933 | In charge of botanical expedition to the Solomon Islands for Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University. |
| 1933-1940 | Botanist, Archbold Expeditions, Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., New York, NY, for 3 expeditions to New Guinea (1933-34, 1936-37, 1938-39) and to Arizona (1940). Expedition photographer, developing film during the expeditions. Led an advance party (1938) to select a site for a coastal base (Challenger Bay), and to construct expedition headquarters and a ramp for <i>Guba</i> , an amphibious airplane. |
| 1940-1966 | Member, Advisory Board, Archbold Expeditions. |
| 1941-1944 | Canadian Army; consultant for US Army on vegetation and ecology of the South Pacific. |
| 1944-1966 | Staff botanist, Archbold Biological Station, Lake Placid, Florida. |
| 1944-1966 | Associate Curator, Archbold Collections, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. |
| 1946 | On loan as botanist for the New York Botanical Gardens to the Vernay Nyasaland Expedition, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. |
| 1947-1948 | Leader and botanist, Archbold Expeditions, Cape York (Queensland, Australia) Expedition. |
| 1949-1950 | On loan, director of field operations, Upjohn-Penick Expedition; botanical exploration in tropical Africa. |
| 1953-1959 | Leader & botanist; 4th (1953-54), 5th (1956-57), 6th (1958-59) Archbold Expeditions to New Guinea. |
| 1955 | With Richard Archbold, collaborated with Corkscrew Rookery Association and conducted field work leading to establishment of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, National Audubon Society. |
| 1955 | Collaborated with G. R. Cooley (field surveys, herbarium visits) in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas, for a manual of the southeastern flora planned by the Gray Herbarium, Harvard University. |
| 1960-1962 | Advisor to Dr. L. M. Perry, Arnold Arboretum; a project on the medicinal plants of the western Pacific. |
| 1961 | Advisor, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (Harvard Univ.) Expedition to the Baliem Valley, Netherlands New Guinea. |

Honors

- Fellow, American Geographical Society.
- Honorary Doctorate (1962), Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.
- Honorary Curator (1966-1971), Flecker Herbarium, Cairns, Queensland, Australia.
- Fellow (1969), Association for Tropical Biology.
- Honorary Member (1971), The Explorers Club.

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