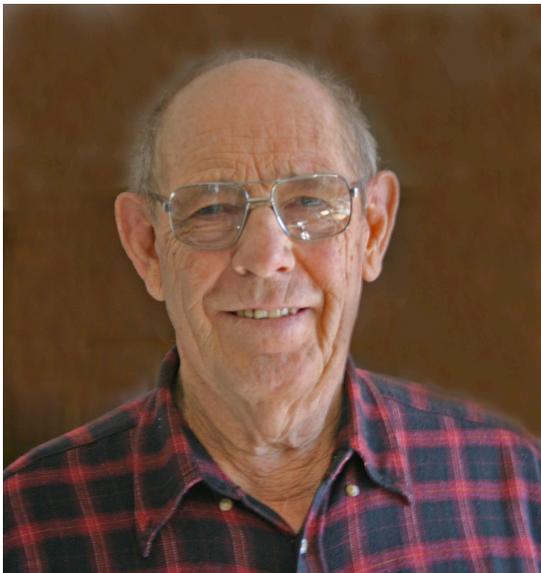


The New Mexican from Texas: Charles R. Hutchins

by Gene Jercinovic



One day in 1969, a forty-one year old plant collector was working in the Bonito Canyon area in the Sacramento Mountains in Otero County, New Mexico. He came down to his vehicle and discovered a stranger nearby. The stranger said that he had noticed plant presses in the vehicle and wondered who could be collecting in the area. The plant collector was Charles Robert Hutchins, commonly known as Bob, who a dozen years later would be the co-author of *A Flora of New Mexico* with William C. Martin. The stranger was Donovan Correll, who a decade later would be the co-author of the *Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas* with Marshall C. Johnston.

Bob Hutchins was born on May 26, 1928 to William C. and Exa Hutchins in Atwell in Callahan County, Texas, about 30 miles east of Abilene. After three years, the family moved to a farm near Content, Texas in Runnels County, roughly 30 miles south of Abilene. Bob started his education at the Content School, which had 4 or 5 rooms. Two grades were housed in each room. The High School was in nearby Lawn. At the time Texas schools only went through the 11th grade. Bob graduated in 1945. During his high school years he was a typical farm boy. He had no particular interest in science or plants.

He decided to go directly to college. He thought about becoming an engineer, but decided on Agricultural Education. He chose to attend John Tarleton Agricultural College, a two-year institution in Stephenville, 90 miles east of Abilene. There he met Imogene "Gene" Schrank. At the end of two years, they decided to continue their education at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, graduating in May 1950. The couple married in June.

Bob's degree was in Agricultural Education. In July 1950 he accepted a job as an Ag teacher in Westbrook, Texas, which he described as "...a wide place in the road between Big Spring and Colorado City." Throughout his college years, Bob had been active in ROTC. During the fall of 1950, Korean War hostilities began to intensify and it was inevitable that Bob would be called into service. The United States Army summoned him early in 1951.

By February he was a soldier at Ft. Hood in Killeen, Texas, as a member of the 2nd Armored Division. In July, his unit was deployed to Germany near Mannheim. Gene was pregnant with the Hutchins' first son James and went to live with her parents in Hamilton County south of Stephenville. The 2nd Armored Division was a combat

division, which had to be prepared to go into the field at 85% strength on two hours notice. As a result, there was little opportunity for travel or entertainment. In April of 1952, Gene and James were able to come to Germany. A second son, Larry, was born there.

The family returned to the United States in April of 1954 and was discharged from the Army in May. They returned to the Lubbock area where Bob accepted a position at Cooper's School in nearby Woodrow. A third son, Steve, arrived soon after. Bob also entered graduate school at Texas Tech to pursue a Masters in Agricultural Education, which he received in 1957. At this point the family returned to Westbrook, where another son, Daniel, was born in 1958, and a daughter, Debra in 1960. Bob became a science teacher and served for two years as principal. In 1962, he began an involvement with National Science Foundation summer programs at Texas Tech, which allowed him to study various aspects of science.

In 1964, the family moved to Post, Texas (founded by C. W. Post of cereal fame.) Bob taught for 2 years, managed to obtain administrative certification, and served as principal for 2 years. Meanwhile, he continued his involvement with the NSF program and began the pursuit of a Master's degree in science. A class in plant taxonomy under Chester Rowell particularly stimulated him and started him on his lifelong journey in plant collecting. He decided to do his thesis on the Flora of Garza County. Post, the Hutchins home base, was the county seat. He made some fascinating discoveries in the course of his research, a colony of wild orchids, peculiar in caprock country, an Egyptian lotus in a stock tank, and #1172, a collection of *Pilostyles thurberi* on *Dalea*, a holy grail for collectors in the southwest.

In the spring of 1968, Bob received an M.S. from Texas Tech. His field studies of Garza County had given him great pleasure and fulfillment. The humdrum routine of the school in Post loomed ahead. During the past several years Bob's interest in science and plants had grown immensely. He had become involved with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, going to meetings and even presenting papers. Through his friendship with Chester Rowell and his membership in AAAS he had developed a relationship with William C. Martin, Associate Professor of Biology of at the University of New Mexico. In August of 1968 the Hutchins family decided to move to Albuquerque to give Bob a chance to continue the study of plants.

Bob landed a job as a science teacher at Monroe Jr. High and Gene worked as a substitute teacher for the Albuquerque Public Schools. Bob began taking classes at UNM. After a year at Monroe he became as assistant principal at Sandia High School. Gene worked towards librarian certification and became an elementary school librarian for the rest of her career. Bob also started working seriously on a project he had dreamed about since 1962. In that year he had taken a field trip to the Sacramento Mountains of Otero County in New Mexico as part of the NSF summer program at Texas Tech. He envisioned the possibility of preparing a flora of the area. He worked on the project for years, eventually self-publishing *A Flora of the White Mountains of Southern Lincoln and Northern Otero Counties* in 1974. Meanwhile, his studies at the University slowed. His passion was plants. The curriculum required courses like zoology and genetics, which did not interest him. He abandoned course work and devoted himself to the joy of hiking the state gathering plant specimens.

Bob remained at Sandia High until 1974, when he moved to Eldorado High. Then, in 1975, he accepted a position at the newly established Career Enrichment Center of the Albuquerque Public Schools, where he remained until 1981. Next came an assignment at Rio Grande High for four years. He then transferred to Highland High, where he remained until his retirement in 1989. While at Eldorado, he decided to return, one more time, to coursework at the University, this time pursuing a Ph.D. in Education, which he achieved in 1979.

During the years in which he explored the Sacramentos for plants, Bob spent much time with Bill Martin. They developed a close friendship. Despite Bob's lack of interest in the complexities of phylogenetics, biochemistry and plant anatomy and physiology, he and Bill shared a common interest in taxonomy and the study of plant distributions. They had also built a comfortable working relationship. This would lead to what may have been the most significant collaboration in each of their lives.

In 1958, when Bill Martin was hired at UNM, the outstanding figure in the Biology Department was Edward Castetter, who became head of the department when he was hired in 1928. Castetter had done much work in ethnobotany, cacti, and general floristics during his career. In 1958, Castetter was vice-president of the University, Dean of the Graduate School, as well as head of the Biology Department, and, in his mid-sixties, getting ready to retire. Castetter, in the twilight of a distinguished career, had two remaining dreams, a treatment of cacti in New Mexico, and the presentation of a new flora of New Mexico. He told Bill Martin that he was more concerned with cacti, and that Bill should consider adopting the flora project. Bill believed in the concept and started fieldwork in the early 60's to achieve the goal. Martin and Castetter worked together to assemble *A Checklist of Gymnosperms and Angiosperms of New Mexico* in 1970. The appearance of Bob Hutchins in the late 60's provided the perfect opportunity to complete the project.

For the decade of the seventies Bob and Bill labored on the flora. Bob contributed his *Flora of the White Mountains* and did extensive field work throughout the state. Bill's graduate students also provided much material. In the late seventies Bill began typing the manuscript. Bob prepared all of the range maps. Bill was approached by the German company J. Cramer about the possibility of publishing the flora. Section by section, the huge manuscript was sent to Germany. Virtually no editing was done by the publisher. The two-volume *A Flora of New Mexico* appeared in 1980-81.

After the Flora was published, neither Bill nor Bob was fully pleased. Bob summarized: "After we got through with the flora, we knew we had left out a lot of things. We slipped up on some things. We did not intend to put Krameriaceae in the Leguminosae family, but we did." They thought about producing a revised checklist, but after some 30 years of combined effort, they soon lost momentum.

During the eighties, Bob continued his efforts in exploring the state and gathering specimens of its plants, concentrating on legumes. By the early nineties, he developed back problems and had to curtail his fieldwork. In his career he collected 13,308 specimens. Of these 7479 were placed at UNM. Among these thousands are two New Mexico collections of the elusive *Pilostyles thurberi*, the only two specimens of this species listed by the New Mexico Biodiversity Collections Consortium. The remainder of his collections were placed in herbaria at the University of North Carolina and Texas

Tech University. Even in retirement he managed to contribute. One day he received a phone call. Bob recalls:

John Kartesz called me one day and asked me if I knew anyone who had a collection of plant pictures, because in his work he wanted to add pictures. I said, well, John, I happen to have a few thousand. I sent him all my slides and let him sort through and pick what he wanted to use.

The relationship lasted for years.

Bob Hutchins has done much to further the understanding of the plants of New Mexico and their distributions. He was not an academician. He was not one to publish articles in scientific journals. He was a careful observer and found his greatest rewards in the field, traveling tirelessly through the deserts and mountains of the state seeking the new and the different. He has often been misinterpreted. He was certainly tenacious in his domain. He never saw himself as an authority or a genius. He simply wanted to be a part of the botanical community and add as much as he could to the knowledge of the natural world.

Bob Hutchins passed away on December 26, 2008. He was first and foremost dedicated to his family. His eldest son Jim tried to express his feelings: "I cannot tell you how important it is to me and my family that folks, whether in the botany community or not, understand how much my Dad affected not only our lives, but contributed to the scientific community. I grew up as a son of this man. You get questions about who you respect. It's simple; I want to be like my Dad. He was the anchor in our family for eighty years. I miss him and there are no replacements."