

OBITUARY

ANNA AMELIA OBERMEYER-MAUVE (1907–2001)

Anna Amelia Obermeyer (Figure 1) was born in Pretoria on 30 July 1907. She matriculated (completed her schooling) at Oost Eind School, Pretoria, in 1925, and then attended the Transvaal University College (now Pretoria University), obtaining the degrees of B.Sc. in 1928 and M.Sc. in 1931. In May 1929 she was appointed botanist in the Transvaal Museum, a post she held until August 1938, when she married Mr Anton Mauve (a collateral descendant of the artist Vincent van Gogh). Before World War II and for many years afterwards, marriage meant exchanging a paid professional career for that of a housewife, and this Mrs Mauve did until 1 December 1957, when she joined the staff of the National Herbarium. In effect, she returned to her former post, as the botanical collections of the Transvaal Museum were transferred to the National Herbarium in 1953 (Fourie 1998) (Figure 2). This time, she was placed in charge of the petaloid monocots, and remained until she reached pensionable age on 30 July 1972. After an overseas holiday with her husband, she returned in a temporary capacity on 30 October 1972. 'Temporary' in this instance acquired an air of permanence, and she was promoted to Temporary Senior Agricultural Researcher on 1 April 1984. She finally retired on 31 August 1985, moved to Pinelands (Cape Town), and passed away peacefully on 10 October 2001.

She studied under Professor C.E.B. Bremekamp at the University of Pretoria, and so was well trained to undertake taxonomic research. At the Transvaal Museum she put this training to good use, and worked mainly on Acanthaceae, producing revisions of *Barleria*, *Blepharis* and *Petalidium*. In addition, she wrote up large collections of plants from the Vernay-Lang expedition to the Kalahari and by Herbert Lang in the Kruger National Park. These were among the first accounts of the flora of these regions. She participated with Prof. Schweickerdt and Miss Verdoorn in an expedition to the Soutpansberg Salt Pan, and was senior author of the resultant published account of specimens collected.

On her return to botany in 1957, she commenced work on the petaloid monocots. The bulk of her publications list from this period is made up of descriptions of individual new species, texts for plates published in *Flowering Plants of Africa* and brief nomenclatural notes. However, she also completed revisions of *Anthericum* and its immediate allies, *Dipcadi* and *Lagarosiphon*. Her service at the Botanical Research Institute coincided with the most active period of production of the *Flora of southern Africa*, and it was stated in the citation for her award of the South African Association of Botanists (SAAB) senior medal for botany, that she had made more contributions to that project than any other botanist. This record still stands, and will probably continue to do so, as National Botanical Institute priorities are now elsewhere, and *Flora* accounts are sought from a much wider pool of botanists than was the case forty years ago.

Where possible, Mrs Mauve made a point of seeing the plants she described in the field. In the course of field expeditions ranging from the massive one to the Soutpansberg, down to brief trips of a few hours, she collected some 4 000 specimens. She collected not only in South Africa, but also on a pioneering expedition to the Eastern Highlands of Rhodesia (now Mutare and Chipinge Districts of Zimbabwe) with Dr V. FitzSimons in 1937. Her specimens are housed in PRE, with duplicates sent to other herbaria as part of the PRE exchange programme and so almost impossible to trace.

For many years she was a member of the council of the South African Biological Society, and edited their journal for part of that time. She was a foundation member of SAAB, and a member of AETFAT (Association pour l'Étude Taxonomique de la Flore d'Afrique Tropicale) and S₂A₃ (the South African Association for the Advancement of Science), whose meetings served the function of bringing botanists together before SAAB was founded.

De Winter & Killick (1982) described her in their motivation for the SAAB award as "one of those self-effacing but completely dedicated 'backroom girls' of science". This fits well with the memories of those who



FIGURE 1.—Anna Amelia Mauve, née Obermeyer (1907–2001). Photo: NBI archive.



FIGURE 2.—From left to right: Mrs Mauve, Dr E.P. Phillips, Mrs R. Pott-Leendertz, Miss I.C. Verdoorn, at the ceremony for the presentation of the Transvaal Museum Herbarium to the National Herbarium, 10 September 1953. Photo: NBI archive.

had the privilege of meeting her in the old Botanical Research Institute. Her knowledge of the petaloid monocots was encyclopaedic, and she shared it with the young freely, but in a very kindly way. The motivation referred to above also mentions the many thousands of identifications she did for other scientists, and her curatorial activities. Indeed, twenty years after that motivation was written, her curation of the monocot specimens is still much in evidence. Although most of this evidence is positive, it has to be admitted that some features of late-twentieth century taxonomic practice passed her by. For example, she apparently never understood the full implications of the idea that PRECIS records of re-identified specimens needed to be updated before the specimens were re-filed. Even today it is not unknown to find an irate member of curatorial staff in the monocots, annoyed at having unearthed yet another 'lost' specimen that was simply re-filed under a new name by Mrs Mauve, who had not informed the computer. However, she was, until the day she finally left the Institute, 'generous to a fault with assistance rendered to all who have approached her', to quote again from De Winter and Killick's motivation.

Volume 42 of *The Flowering Plants of Africa* (1970–1972) was dedicated to her. In 1983 she was awarded the SAAB Senior Medal for Botany. Part 6 of volume 53 of *South African Journal of Botany* bears a dedication to Mrs Mauve, and is made up chiefly of papers on groups in which she was interested.

Mrs Mauve is commemorated in the plant names *Hemizygia obermeyerae* Ashby, *Asparagus obermeyerae* Jessop, *Barleria ameliae* A.Meeuse and *Lachenalia ameliae* W.F.Barker.

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