

CHARLES GLASS BIOGRAPHY

Chuck Staples, CSSA Historian

Glass, Charles Edward (1934–1998)—editor of *Cactus and Succulent Journal* for 27 years and discoverer of succulent plants in Mexico.



Born in New York City on 24 May 1934, Charles Glass became a linguist, actor, nurseryman, horticulturist, conchologist, journal editor, lecturer, book dealer, prolific writer and succulent plant specialist. During his youth he spent a couple of summers in Paris, France studying French at La Sorbonne, served a hitch in the US Army in Germany in the mid-1950s, studied at Paul Mann's Actor's Workshop in New York City and took master classes at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California under Lotte Lehmann in the summer of 1957. It was at the academy that he first met Ganna Walska (1887–1984), owner of the famous *Lotusland Gardens* in Santa Barbara. A visit to Lotusland that summer was one of his first exposures to succulent plants. (From 1973–1983 Glass was a director of Ganna Walska's Lotusland.)

Returning to New York City on New Year's Eve 1958 Charles found a job at Columbia University. After taking a few courses he ended up with a Bachelor of Science degree from the university majoring in acting and language. By this time he was proficient in English, Latin, Tagalog (Filipino), French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian.

After moving to California permanently in 1960, Charles (preferring that name to "Charlie") started his succulent plant hobby with a few cacti from Sears Roebuck & Company. A visit to the Schultz Nursery in Encinitas inspired him to begin a serious study of cacti and other succulent plants. It was a chance find of an *Agave Americana* landscape plant at a small dilapidated cactus nursery in 1961 that was Charles' inauguration into the cactus business. He bought the nursery for \$300. It was located on Ventura Boulevard in Woodland Hills of the San Fernando Valley. He named it "That Cactus Shop" and opened for business on April Fool's Day 1962.

Charles wrote to Scott Haselton (1895–1991), owner of Abbey Garden Press, in 1962 to obtain details on buying books wholesale to sell in his shop. Charles finally drove to Pasadena to complain after writing again and not receiving a reply from Scott. During this encounter Scott talked Charles into eventually taking over Scott's whole business, including book stock, printing business, plants and the *Cactus and Succulent Journal*. In the meantime Scott asked that he receive only 50% of what Charles sold if he would come to Pasadena now. Not able to pass up such a deal, Charles promptly closed his shop and moved to Pasadena.

Charles started writing for the Journal in May 1964. By the end of that year Charles took over the active Abbey Garden Press business. He was the unofficial editor of the Journal during 1965, under Scott's guidance. He became editor of the Journal with the first issue of 1966. By this time Charles was Vice President of California Cactus Growers and a member of the African Succulent Plant Society and of the International Succulent Institute (ISI). His first serious exploratory and collecting trip to Mexico was in 1963, the year he met Robert [Bob] Allen Foster (1938–2002). Charles and Bob entered into a partnership with the Abbey Garden Press business and travelled together for collecting trips in Mexico by 1968.

Charles edited the Journal for 27 years from 1966 through 1992 (28 years if you count his 1965 unofficial year under editor Scott Haselton). He authored books such as *Family Album* (1966 Yearbook of CSSA); *Cacti and Succulents for the Amateur* (with Bob Foster) 1975, *Wise Garden Encyclopedia* (sections on cactus and other succulent plants) 1990; and *Cacti* (with Clive Innes (1909–1999)) 1991. Charles edited and published *The Cacti and Succulents of El Paso* by Clark Champie (1916–1998) 1974 and other publications. He wrote many Journal articles during his time as editor.

New Taxa described by Charles or by Charles and other authors add up to more than 50. The first plant described by Charles was *Mammillaria saboae* in 1966, named in honor of his friend, Kitty Sabo (1917–2005). She and her son Brian discovered the new plant in Chihuahua, Mexico in 1965. Bob Foster named *Mammillaria glassii* in honor of Charles in 1968 after they discovered the new plant earlier that year in Nuevo León, Mexico. The last plant Charles described was the sensational *Aztekium hintonii*, which he described with Walter Alfred Fitz Maurice (1924–2015) in 1992 and named in honor of its discoverer, George Sebastian Hinton (1949–).

In 1991 Charles moved to Mexico as curator of cacti and other succulent plants and of the herbarium at El Charco del Ingenio, the botanic gardens at San Miguel de Allende in Guanajuato, Mexico.

Charles became a member of the International Organization for Succulent Plant Study (IOS) in 1964. He was chairman of the CSSA Convention in Pasadena in 1969, the society's 40th anniversary. He organized the first IOS North American congress in Santa Barbara

in 1974. Charles received the prestigious CSSA Fellow award in 1979 for leader of extensive cactus and succulent explorations in Mexico, describer of new taxa of Cactaceae and editor of CSSA Journal from 1966 to present.

Charles Glass died suddenly of cardio-pulmonary failure on 23 February 1998. As Gordon Rowley (1921–) put it, “Many will mourn his passing, not only as epitomizing the best in American cactology, but as a dear friend, generous and understanding, a fine lecturer and companion in the field. He left his mark with plant descriptions and publications that put many in his debt.” A small garden at Rancho Alcocer, Mexico was dedicated to Charles where his ashes were scattered.

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