

## **LeRoy Ellsworth Detling (1898-1967)**

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LeRoy Detling served as curator of the herbarium at the University of Oregon from 1939 until his death in 1967. He worked on the collection and taxonomy of far western plants and plant fossils (with monographs on *Cardamine (Dentaria)*, *Descurainia*, and *Lupinus*), and on the ecology and origin of Oregon plant communities, with particular attention later in his career to plant migration. This subject took him on several trips to Mexico, where he collected many specimens for the herbarium. All of his herbarium specimens now reside at Oregon State University.

LeRoy Detling was born on October 23, 1898 in Groton, South Dakota. His parents, like so many of their generation, emigrated west, where they were farmers and orchardists in Washington and California. He graduated from Gridley (California) Union High School in 1916, attended Philomath (Oregon) College and then went to the University of Oregon, where he received his BA in Romance languages in 1921.

In 1921-22 Detling taught high school Latin and French in Wallowa, Oregon. A love of languages that would stay with him all his life prompted him to go for an advanced degree, and he received his MA in French from Stanford University in 1923. He then returned to Oregon to teach Romance languages at Willamette University in Salem (1924-26) and at the University of Oregon (1927-1930).

During the teaching years at the U. of O., Louis F. Henderson, then curator of the plant collection, served as Detling's mentor, training him in the techniques of collecting, identifying, and caring for herbarium specimens. Eventually Detling went back to Stanford and received his MA in 1933 and his PhD in 1936.

The year Detling returned to the University of Oregon with his new PhD, the Museum of Natural History was created, with the herbarium as one of its four units. Henderson formally became curator of the herbarium and Detling was hired part time and, when Henderson retired in 1939, Detling succeeded him as full-time curator. For nearly 30 years, Detling directed and developed the herbarium and taught for many years in the departments of botany, zoology, and finally biology. After 1957 he focused almost entirely on herbarium work, limiting his teaching to small classes of advanced students in plant taxonomy and species distribution, plus advising graduate students in their theses and dissertations.

Detling gathered thousands of specimens from the far West—most notably those on which were based his monographs on *Cardamine (Dentaria)*, *Descurainia*, and *Lupinus*. An interest in plant migrations and the origins of current western flora took Detling to Mexico five times (most significantly a sabbatical leave in 1961-62) and once to Costa

Rica. The Mexican collection comes largely from the western Sierra Madre in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Aguascalientes and Colima.

Detling's commitment to botany extended beyond the herbarium. He served as an officer of the 4-H organization in Lane County; was on the staff at Camp Lane, a 4-H camp in the Coast Range; and led forestry and entomology clubs for many years. From time to time he was also called into court to identify plants—once to find that the contents of a suspicious cigarette was actually Scotch broom flowers!

On September 19, 1967, LeRoy Detling died of a heart attack as left his house to walk to an evening of work at "the herb." The faculty recorded, "We will miss this quiet, patient man. Even those who were only casually acquainted with him will be saddened at the loss. . . . The many thousands of plants he collected will serve botanists and students for many years to come. His memorial will be the simple statement on the label of each of these specimens, 'Collected by LeRoy E. Detling.'"

Eileen Flory is the daughter of LeRoy and Mildred Detling.