

**HARRIET  
GEORGE  
BARCLAY**  
**1901-1990**



**BOTANIST,  
PLANT  
ECOLOGIST,  
AND ARTIST**

Dr. Harriet Barclay was more than just an environmentalist. She was an outstanding plant ecologist, stimulating but demanding teacher, skilled photographer and artist, enthusiastic field person, and lover of all nature.

Harriet George was born in Minnesota in August 1901. She received her B.A. in 1923 and M.A. in 1924 in botany at the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. in plant ecology from the University of Chicago in 1928 under the direction of pioneer ecologist Dr. Henry C. Cowles, where she met and married Bertram “Don” Barclay.

World-renowned botanists Bertram and Harriet Barclay were the faces of the University of Tulsa’s Department of Botany for many years. They arrived in 1929 when Bertram was hired to organize the department. Harriet taught part-time, then full-time, carrying on the Cowlesian tradition of taking students out of the classroom to observe first-hand the natural relationships of plants. She also taught courses in plant ecology and Rocky Mountain flora at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in Gothic, Colorado from 1929 to 1977.

She earned a B.A. in art in 1945, becoming a well-known and respected photographer. In 1949, she was promoted to Professor of Botany and, in 1953, became department chair when Don was killed in an automobile accident. She taught at TU for 43 years until she retired in 1972. Barclay also taught courses as a visiting professor at the University of Oklahoma, University of Arkansas, University of Eastern Illinois, and North Carolina State University.

In 1958 Barclay received funding from the National Science Foundation, spending eighteen months carrying out botanical field work in the high Andes of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. She also collected over 35,000 plants from six different continents, including 15,000 different specimens from South America while conducting research there. She had over 2,000 specimens on record as identified or collected. Ten plants are named after her.

In the summer of 1969, Dr. Barclay asked Washington DC’s Nature Conservancy to help preserve an 85-acre nature preserve called Redbud Valley northeast of Tulsa. The Conservancy agreed to purchase the land for \$80,000, then lease it to TU for \$1 a year, with the stipulation that the debt be paid off with locally-raised funds. Redbud Valley Nature Preserve became Oklahoma’s first Nature Conservancy project. Barclay enlisted the Tulsa Tribune newspaper to help support the fundraising to repay the Nature Conservancy.

Barclay’s contributions to both the scientific and cultural communities were acknowledged by numerous awards, including Conservationist of the Year, Oklahoma Wildlife Federation (1971) and Oklahoma Hall of Fame (1976). Barclay died in May 1990 at age 88.

Barclay’s interest in the world took her to the rain forests of South America, the peak of Africa’s Mount Kilimanjaro, the Great Wall of China and the glaciers of the Arctic. She is remembered as a legendary teacher, conservation leader and community organizer for the Redbud Valley Nature Reserve. Her enthusiasm for botany and obvious concern for her students was evident in teachers and professionals of all levels across the country who looked to her as their mentor.