

ED VOSS—AS AN EDITOR

Richard K. Rabeler

University of Michigan Herbarium
3600 Varsity Drive
Ann Arbor MI 48108-2228

Thomas J. Rosatti

University and Jepson Herbaria
1001 Valley Life Sciences Building #2465
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720-2465

Ed Voss founded *The Michigan Botanist*, with the first issue appearing 1962. It was “his” from the start. Not only did he edit submitted articles, he provided many book reviews, and started several regular features. *Michigan Plants in Print* was an annotated list of “significant literature relating to Michigan botany since the beginning of 1960”; installments of this feature appeared in 27 volumes of the journal (see list in the introductory article). *News of Botanists* included notes about faculty assuming new positions, graduate students completing degrees and assuming new positions, etc. He oversaw the editing and production of the first 15 volumes, handing over the editorial reigns to Howard Crum in 1977; the Club honored Ed for his service as the first editor with an award. He continued to serve as an advisor to the journal, remaining on the Editorial Board until his passing.

As many know, Ed was an editor’s editor. He developed a command for the English language, no doubt fostered by his father’s experiences in teaching Latin and Greek. Typos, incorrect usage, and factual errors were not for him. The editorial staff at the Ann Arbor News knew him well from the many letters to the editor that he penned over the years.

I (RKR) remember when I submitted my second paper to *The Michigan Botanist* around 1980. Although not the editor at the time, Ed reviewed the paper. His review was nearly as long as the paper—scary to a grad student, but the thoroughness made it a much better paper.

When I (RKR) became one of the co-editors of *The Michigan Botanist* in 1988, I knew that he always inspected the latest issue when it arrived. I always approached the release of another issue with trepidation—would the “O” in “Botanist” be precisely aligned over the Straits of Mackinac on the cover? Would Ed spot some needless typos? Would the fourth number of a volume be mailed during the same calendar year—Ed did notice the one time when that did not take place. Actually, having the founding editor watching likely made my products better!

Anyone who knew Ed was well aware that Ed “told it like it is”; no skirting an issue for him. Ed received a copy of a volume entitled *Manual of the Seed*

Plants of Indiana to review in 1989. One also readily knew when Ed did not like something. He started his review with “That whirring noise you hear in the background is Charles C. Deam [author of the 1940 *Flora of Indiana*] turning in his grave”—and it got worse. In fact, I had to add an editorial note at the end of his two-page review when it appeared in 1990—“This book has been withdrawn by the publisher.” How many reviewers can claim that distinction?

I (TJR) always will remember, with great fondness and admiration for the man, the time I asked Dr. Voss to serve on my dissertation committee, as co-chairman. I had been having trouble working up the nerve to do so, because I had gotten the feeling that he had not been writing to any relatives about my work, at least not in a good way. So, I began very cautiously, but before I could get to the actual question, he announced, in that abrupt, loud, deep, clear, certain way of his, “No way!”. Luckily, I had experienced this sort of thing before (my dad was comparably decisive), and so was not completely deterred, but I did proceed from that point even more cautiously in establishing that I had not yet asked him anything, and that if he would clarify just what he was refusing to do, it might be helpful. He responded that because he knew nothing about “species problems”, he was not qualified to review my dissertation proposal. Now I was seriously concerned, because my intention had been to ask for much more than this. I responded with a very subdued, “Oh . . . uh, um, er, actually, I was intending to ask about something far more involved: that you not only review my proposal, but serve on my dissertation committee, as well . . . and that you not only serve on it, but serve on it as, um, er . . . co-chairman.” Somehow, that did not send Dr. Voss heading for the hills, possibly because I had quickly followed those remarks with an explanation that I didn’t need him to know anything about “species problems” per se, but rather that I simply wanted my work to benefit from what I had observed to be his tough, thorough, rigorous, honest, fair, and nearly always correct scrutiny.

I (TJR) had this experience in mind as I handed Dr. Voss an early draft of my dissertation, while standing in his office, marveling over the fact he had a little stand for his phone so he could make use of the desk surface underneath it. We chatted about various problems I had had along the way in addressing my dissertation topic, as Dr. Voss paged through what I had handed him. At one point he interrupted something I was saying to point out that something I had written near the end contradicted something I had written a couple of hundred pages earlier. He was correct about the contradiction, of course, and this, together with the fact that he had noticed it so easily and so readily, made me realize I had done the right thing several years earlier in standing in there until he reversed his initial position and agreed to serve on my dissertation committee, as co-chairman.

A couple years later, I (TJR) handed over to Dr. Voss a reprint of the first publication to result from my post-doctoral gig, which was to prepare treatments for the Generic Flora of the Southeastern United States. For what was the first time in my recollection, Dr. Voss seemed pleased to have something I had given him. As he slowly went through it, handling each page in a way that reminded me of the way he would hold up a plant about which he was teaching, with delicacy and appreciation, he said that he loved that series of papers, because “every single mark on every single page means something,” which I took as the ultimate

compliment for my editors, and initially as a comment that had very little to do with me. However, as it turned out, it had a lot to do with me, in the sense that it had a large, important impact on my development as an editor, as well as author: it planted in my brain, just as firmly and significantly, relatively speaking, as that flag was planted atop Mount Suribachi, that each mark does matter, both in its own right and in terms of the effect it has on higher levels of organization: the groupings of marks into words, phrases, keys, descriptions, treatments, and floras.

This thought occurred to me (TJR) countless times over the past 25 years, over and over again, as I did my part in transforming manuscripts that had been submitted by hundreds of authors into pieces that would fit together into a much larger whole: The Jepson Manual—Higher Plants of California, and just recently its Second Edition (TJM2).

For the past couple of months, I (TJR) have been making corrections to TJM2. That they number in the hundreds has not been the most satisfying news, but it has gotten me to think yet again about the great concern that Dr. Voss demonstrated so many years ago for all those marks that are supposed to mean something. Although I am sure that there would have been many fewer corrections had Dr. Voss himself been more directly involved with our project (i.e., more directly involved than having inspired and trained its Scientific Editor), I was heartened by something that we determined just a few days ago: there are over 10 million marks in TJM2 (if spaces are counted), so the fact that a few hundred of them are incorrect is . . . completely unacceptable! As (nearly) always, yes, you are correct, Dr. Voss; we needed you, we thank you, and we will miss your influence.