Resolution of Respect

Vladimir Joseph Krajina (1905-1993) A Tribute

A bright light that had shone in the ecological theater for many decades went out on 1 June 1993 when Dr. Vladimir Joseph Krajina died in Vancouver, British Columbia. In his passage, North America, indeed the world, lost a most illustrious botanist and ecologist. He became a member of the Ecological Society of America in 1949, the same year he arrived in North America. For the next 44 years on this continent, he further enriched the fields of botany, ecology, and forestry in a remarkable way.

Born on 5 January 1905 in Slavice, a small Moravian village in Czechoslovakia, he was drawn to the diversity of flora and fauna at a very early age, "like a moth to the flame," as he once reminisced. A gifted and bright student of nature and natural sciences, his interest in plant taxonomy began when he was 12, and his first paper was published at 19. He received his doctorate from Charles University in Prague at the young age of 22 under the tutelage of Karel Domin. He joined the faculty there and, in time, rose to become Professor of Botany and Head of what must have been the first and only Department of Plant Sociology and Ecology in the world. His first faculty appointment coincided with the landmark publication in 1929 of Josius Braun-Blanquet's *Pflanzensoziologie: Grundzüge der Vegetationskunde*.

His doctoral dissertation dealt with the systematics of the genus *Festuca* and he continued his work in taxonomy and systematics throughout his career. His interest, however, was much more in community organization and in 1927, he started meticulously collecting data on plant communities and their soil relationships. After his return from a sabbatical leave in the Hawaiian Islands during 1929-1930, he completed for his Docent degree a two-part, 408-page monograph on the plant communities of the Tatra Mountains in 1933. The Second World War burst on the European scene shortly thereafter. In addition to changing his life in a substantive way, the 250-page manuscript dealing with soils and microclimates of his Tatra Mountain study was destroyed by the Gestapo in 1939.

Professor Krajina was a major player in the Allied resistance effort during the Second World War. At what point and under what circumstances he was drawn into it remains a mystery to me. I have had much interest (though none of the scholarship) in the politics and history of the world. I tried to draw him into a discussion on how he got so immersed in politics during an evening or two on our field trips. "Someday," he would say, and change the topic. One particular evening, I made a very serious effort, with a degree of preparation: dates, places, names, and all. I asked him to comment on two books by Josef Korbel, the last Foreign Minister before Czechoslovakia fell to the Communists. (After the Communists took over his country, Mr. Korbel settled in the United States; his daughter, Dr. Madeleine Albright, is the current United States Ambassador to the United Nations.) *Danger in Kashmir* (1954) dealt with my native place and *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia* (1959) dealt with his. But, alas, to no avail. He nicely, but firmly, declined to comment.

As a leader of the Unified Czech Resistance (*Ustredni vybor odboje domaciho, UVOD*) movement from 1939-1945 against the Nazis, he provided most valuable and substantial information to the Allies throughout the war. Describing the "glorious" deeds of Professor Krajina in the British House of Lords on 23 November 1949, Lord Vansittart noted:

[Photo by Ralph Bower of the *Vancouver Sun*, reprinted with permission.]

Krajina "was not only anti-Nazi; he was also anti-totalitarian . . . for that reason communists were about to destroy him. They were responsible for his capture by the Gestapo on January 31, 1943 . . . [Krajina] took poison but the Gestapo pumped him out. I may add that his brother was executed by the Gestapo in 1942, that his son died here in the Air Force in 1941, and that his wife was thrust into the abominable camp of Ravensbruck" (Korbel 1959).

After the War ended, his wartime activities were investigated, and his conduct found "beyond reproach." He was awarded the highest order of merit by the President of the Czechoslovak Republic. He became the Secretary-General of the National Socialist Party in 1945 and was elected as a member of the parliament. When Czechoslovakia lost her independence on 10 July 1947, his case was reopened by the Communists, he was tried in absentia, and given a 25-year prison term. His escape from the country has been described as "miraculous." Details of his and his family's escape through "ski slopes

with one suit case full of clothes, the other full of papers," to Vancouver, Canada via Great Britain have never been divulged.

On arrival in Vancouver, he approached the University of British Columbia (UBC) for a position and became a Lady Davis Foundation Fellow and Special Lecturer. He resisted, with noticeable pain, discussing the war, its atrocities, and his personal suffering, noting that "it was now a matter of the past," and he applied himself with single-minded devotion to the pursuit of ecological studies. A thorough field botanist, he walked through the length and breadth of the province of British Columbia and was much fascinated by the diversity of its vegetation, soils, and fauna.

It took him a decade to mentally map vegetation of the province, examine the microclimatic nuances, and propose a bioclimatic zonal classification (1959), later revised as the biogeoclimatic zones (1965). During this time, he also conducted some pioneering physiological studies on the nutritional requirements of major British Columbia conifer species (Douglas-fir, western hemlock, sitka spruce, and western red cedar). The vegetation classification scheme combined a remarkable blend of ecological concepts proposed before him: community change in a broad geographic sense of Clements, the "state factor" approach of Hans Jenny, the Braun-Blanquet and "southern European" tradition of phytosociology, the biogeocoenotic concepts of the Russians, and the pedological schema of Kubiena (see Wali 1988). His research career, which spanned nearly 70 years, included landmark papers both in plant systematics and ecology. A complete listing of his contributions is available (Wali 1988, Jenik 1992).

His interest in graduate education was genuine, indeed phenomenal. He accepted graduate students soon after he began his career at UBC and this continued well after his retirement. At UBC, he directed the work of 24 doctoral and 9 Master's students; their names and thesis titles are given elsewhere (see Wali 1988). There were also some programs that he guided at the University of Hawaii. As extremely gracious and urbane as he was in personal relations, he was also a very demanding teacher and researcher.

His efforts to convince the provincial government of British Columbia to establish ecological reserves must be spectacular. Drawing on his ecological prowess and the timely ushering in of the International Biological Programme, he tirelessly lobbied the legislature. The British Columbia Reserves Act passed in 1971 and the legislative mandate emphasized that the "Ecological Reserves should not be confused with parks or other types of recreational areas, historical or archeological sites, and wildlife management areas. They are areas of the Crown land set aside for . . .

- scientific research and educational purposes to study nature in an undisturbed environment;
- benchmarks against which to measure the effects of change created by man or nature;
- banks of genetic materials;
- preserving rare, unique, and endangered native plants or animals in their natural surroundings."

Today, there are 134 ecological reserves in British Columbia, covering a total of 160,000 ha (Ceska 1993). Ecological Reserve Number 45 (9,834 ha) at Port Chanal on the west coast of Graham Island was named the Vladimir J. Krajina Reserve. "I suspect that this [the establishment of ecological reserves] may be the grandest development of its kind on this continent," noted Frank Egler (*personal communication*).

After his retirement, honors flowed. Among them were the George Lawson Medal for "notable contributions to the advancement of Canadian botany" by the Canadian Botanical Association (1972), the National Film Board of Canada's tribute in a film production titled "Vladimir Krajina and Forests" (1978), Member, Order of Canada (1981), UBC's Doctor of Science *honoris causa*, the Douglas H. Pimlot Award of the Canadian Nature Federation (1982), and the establishment of the V. J. Krajina Chair by the UBC Faculty of Forestry (1990). In 1990, President Vaclav Havel presented him with the highest possible civilian honor, the Czechoslovak "Order of the White Lion." After Krajina, President Francois Mitterand of France received the same distinction (Griffin 1990).

How does one place an epitaph on a life story so rich but varied, to a career so illustrious, on an ecologist so gifted, and on a man so generous and urbane? And a close and comfortable association, cherished for 27 years, is not without emotion. Perhaps no post-script is needed except to echo the words of the Bard: "This was a man!"

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