Mt. Cuba Center has lost a dear friend and generous supporter. Frederick W. Case, Jr., notable author, avid field botanist, beloved biology teacher, and expert gardener who resided in Saginaw, Michigan, passed away on January 12, 2011 at the age of 83 after an extended battle with cancer.
Fred Case was an authority on native orchids, trilliums, insectivorous plants, and wildflowers. Along with his talented wife, Roberta, he authored and co-authored many articles as well as three books: *Orchids of the Western Great Lakes Region; Trilliums; and Wildflowers of the Western Great Lakes Region*.

The last time we enjoyed Fred’s company was 2008 when he graciously agreed to be the keynote speaker at the Mt. Cuba Center Trillium Symposium. In April of that year, at 81 years of age, he was still able to captivate and enthrall the audience with his vast firsthand knowledge of trilliums gleaned from years of field experience and recount many amusing anecdotes from his innumerable plant exploration adventures.

As well as knowledge, encouragement, and advice, Fred and Roberta (who passed away in 1998) generously contributed many rare and unusual plants to us. Over a 20 year span we received 100 accessions of plants from the Cases, 22 of which were trilliums.

Fred and Roberta met our founder, Mrs. Lammot du Pont Copeland, in 1984 at the 50th anniversary of the North American Rock Garden Society in Asheville, NC. Sharing a love of wildflowers, especially trilliums, the Cases enjoyed a warm 17-year friendship with Mrs. Copeland that included shared field trips, garden visits, and many plant gifts. After Mrs. Copeland’s death in 2001, Fred continued to mentor and share his remarkable knowledge with us.

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Jeanne Frett, Horticultural Research Manager remembers, “I had the honor of accompanying Mrs. Copeland and then director, Dr. Richard W. Lighty, on a trip to visit the Cases’ home in 1996. Their gracious hospitality, lovely wildflower garden resulting from over 40 years of investigation and close observation of native plants in the wild, and enthusiasm for plant exploration were impressive.”

It would be difficult to surpass Mrs. Copeland’s comment about Fred Case, though. She noted that “...to trek through the woodlands and swamps of Michigan with him is an experience that I am proud to have been able to share.”

“Fred freely opened his home, garden, and spirit of sharing with us,” reminisced Mt. Cuba Center director, Rick Lewandowski. “In the mid-2000s, despite Fred’s limited mobility, he still loved to share his passion for nature. With ski poles in hand, he trekked out into forests and bogs of northern Michigan to introduce me to his favorite habitats.”

“An experience I’ll never forget is Fred and his traveling companion Jim Briggs bouncing their way across a floating bog mat stopping to point out, only after reaching our destination far from the shore, that below this interlacing matrix of sphagnum was a 20-foot deep pool of murky black water. This was truly one of the most exhilarating - and frightening - moments of my life! But this was quintessential Fred Case, the teacher and mentor, always bringing you to the ultimate classroom - nature itself.”

All of us at Mt. Cuba Center are truly honored by Fred Case’s friendship and generosity. We will be reminded of these qualities every time we view “his” plants now gracing our woodland garden from the trilliums and pitcher plants to shooting stars and lady’s slipper orchids.

Most importantly, though, Fred Case’s legacy and impact will continue because of his ceaseless passion to teach, mentor, write, and share plants.

A true giant in the fields of horticulture and botany is gone, but certainly not forgotten.