

*In memoriam Oscar Sziklai (1924–1998)*

Oscar Sziklai, a prominent figure of the world-wide community of forest geneticists and tree breeders was born in a family of a forest ranger in hilly Northeast Hungary. He graduated in forest engineering at the Forestry Faculty of the Polytechnic University in Sopron during the war years. In 1951 he joined Sopron University and became the assistant to Gyula Roth, the legendary professor of silviculture and one-time IUFRO president. Oscar specialized in tree breeding and seed technology.

During the 1956 uprising in Hungary, Oscar Sziklai played an active role in the establishment of the local democratic self-government and had to leave the country together with a large part of the Faculty and students while the communist regime was being restored by the Russians. Thanks to the generosity of the Canadian government the forestry group of Hungarian émigrés was settled in Vancouver. The „Sopron Faculty of Forestry“ of the University of British Columbia operated from 1957 until 1961, when the last students graduated. Oscar started working at the UBC Forestry Faculty where he introduced genetics and related courses for forestry students. He became full professor in 1971. Between 1982 and 1985 he was acting head of the Forest Sciences Department.

Oscar Sziklai's main interest was in genetics and improvement of Douglas fir. He published papers on quantitative genetic variation, allozyme polymorphism, nuclear characteristics and reproductive phenology of the species. The work with Douglas fir brought him into international cooperation, first of all in IUFRO, then with other agencies. Between 1983 and 1990 he led the IUFRO working party on Douglas fir improvement, organized and chaired various meetings and workshops on this subject. He was a lifelong member and chair of a number of professional organizations and societies (Committee on Forest Tree Breeding in Canada, Western Forest Genetics Society of Canada, Northwest Science Association).

As a visiting professor and expert of various international agencies he has worked in France, Japan, Egypt, Switzerland, Germany and Czechoslovakia. His main interest in international cooperation was however China. Starting from the early eighties he visited China approximately twenty times, participated in and counselled forestry projects and lectured at various universities. He became honorary member of the Chinese Forestry Association in 1985. His international activities brought him many other honours, including the Distinguished Service Award of IUFRO (1990).

From early on he maintained close professional and collegial links with home country, notwithstanding that in the early years of the new Communist era he was treated with suspicion by authorities. In 1982 he co-authored a Hungarian textbook on forest genetics with K. Tompa. He became an honorary doctor of Sopron University in 1990. In the years of retirement his visits to Hungary became more frequent and fate willed it that during an official visit he suddenly passed away in September 1998, on the campus of the University, where his career started. His friendly and cooperative personality will be missed by his numerous personal and professional friends.

*Csaba Mátyás (Sopron, Hungary)*