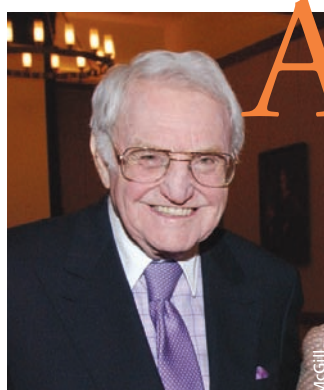


# Lewis B. Cullman: Nurturing Nature at the Garden



As a member of one of New York's most distinguished families whose ancestors include renowned Supreme Court jurist Benjamin Cardozo and noted 19th-century poet Emma Lazarus, Lewis B. Cullman reflected, "I was born with some formidable blood in my veins."

Cullman and his three older brothers were groomed since birth by their determined father to enter the family's lucrative tobacco business. As a result, he waited for more than twelve years before daring to reveal his childhood dream to any figure of authority: he wanted to be a weatherman. It may not have come as a

U.S. Naval Air Station in Lakehurst, site of the infamous Hindenburg crash in 1937. His job was to provide reliable weather information for the successful launching and landing of airships ("blimps").

Following five active months, Cullman was put in charge of forecasting at a new naval air station in South Weymouth, Massachusetts, near Boston. One day not long after his arrival, before adequate personnel and equipment had been installed, he noticed the anemometer pole bent at a 45-degree angle amidst an enormous storm cloud. He learned quickly about the swiftness and severity of a tornado as its high winds snapped a blimp's mooring lines, hurling it into nearby woods. One week later, Cullman detected a similar

called to the family business to handle its investments, he succumbed to his father's wishes. Following an unfulfilling stint, Cullman started building his own fortune in the early 1960s. He is credited with developing the strategy now known as the "leveraged buyout," a financial model involving the buying and selling of companies.

Often citing his mother's early influence on his views about philanthropy, Cullman enjoys giving and helping people during his lifetime. He has found, however, that "giving money away, in ways that really make a difference, can be every bit as challenging as making it." With his wife, Dorothy, Cullman has contributed nearly \$250 million to the sciences, arts, and education. By his own admission, one of "the most satisfying charitable forays" they have undertaken is the Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Program for Molecular Systematics Studies.

In May 1993, Cullman joined the Board of The New York Botanical Garden and currently

The Cullman Program's recognition in the scientific community is evidenced by a number of significant public and private grants, including several National Science Foundation grants. The program also laid the foundation for the Garden's Genomics Program, which explores how genes function and includes the Garden's independent genomics research as well as its participation, as a founding member, in the New York Plant Genomics Consortium, a unique collaboration with New York University, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories, and the American Museum of Natural History.

These ambitious undertakings and pioneering accomplishments would not have been possible—nor even conceived of—without the scope and boldness of Cullman's vision more than a decade ago. He foresaw the critical future of botanical research. His inspiration and generosity enabled the Garden to set up laboratory facilities and hire staff eleven years ago to develop its molecular

"I am always looking for places that break the bonds of the conventional." —*Lewis B. Cullman*

surprise to his mother, however, who watched him pore over issues of the *Daily Weather Map* for years, after he requested a subscription around the age of seven.

His interest in meteorology continued throughout boarding schools in New England and at Yale University, where he could often be found in the New Haven station of the U.S. Weather Bureau. When queried by an academic advisor about a topic for his senior thesis that really interested him, Cullman finally "admitted" it was the weather, which elicited the response, "That's wonderful!"

After graduation in spring 1941, Cullman sought a way to avoid his father's not-so-subtle career expectations. With World War II raging in Europe that year, Cullman joined a U.S. Navy program to train meteorologists for the war effort. It was conducted by the New York University College of Engineering, located in the Bronx at that time. Because he was among its top ten students when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, normal degree requirements were waived, and he received orders to report to the

weather configuration rapidly approaching. With time to sound the alarm and monitor the situation with all hands on deck, disaster was averted, unlike several other area stations. When the commandant of the First Naval District checked in by phone, he was told, "No problem here, our man forecasted it." As a result, Cullman became the commandant's unofficial personal weatherman!

After successfully guiding Navy airships across the Atlantic until the war ended, Cullman became co-owner and head forecaster of Weather Advisors, Inc. outside Boston in 1945. He soon discovered that his real competition in business was not the handful of other private forecasting services. In fact it was the U.S. Weather Bureau, which was "acting like the 800-pound gorilla of meteorology." In 1948, he testified before a Senate subcommittee against the bureau's federal budget appropriation, noting that, as in any other business, competition spawned research and encouraged better practices. After testing the market in New York City, Cullman decided to steer a different course and went to work on Wall Street. Within several years,



serves as Senior Vice Chairman. Launched in 1994 with an important donation from the Cullmans, the Cullman Program was founded as a joint initiative between the Botanical Garden and the American Museum of Natural History, applying the newest technologies to some of the oldest questions in science. He remarked, "It's no secret: I like science and I like supporting scientific research."

Cullman's continued foresight and financial support (a total of \$22 million to date) have allowed the Garden to develop new resources and build the state-of-the-art facilities that will keep its scientists in the forefront of botanical research by integrating their unique expertise with the newly evolving technologies of the genomics era. The scientific staff, graduate students, and visiting researchers of the Cullman Program are involved in a variety of projects, both in the laboratory and the field, that employ a host of tools and techniques to address questions about plant biodiversity and evolution. This spring, the program will relocate to the Garden's new 28,000-square-foot Pfizer Plant Research Laboratory.

research program. Five years ago, this expanded into the newly developing field of plant genomics research.

The advent of new molecular technologies and digital communications and the growing urgency of the global biodiversity extinction crisis have rekindled interest in plant science. Today, because of Lewis B. Cullman's visionary philanthropy, The New York Botanical Garden is acknowledged as a worldwide leader in the study of plants and as a preeminent center for research on relationships between people and their environments.



**Opposite top:** Lewis B. Cullman is one of New York's most generous and dedicated benefactors of the sciences, arts, and education.

**Opposite bottom:** Cullman (center) giving a lesson in weather forecasting at the South Weymouth Naval Air Station

**Middle series:** The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Program for Molecular Systematics Studies will be housed in the new Pfizer Plant Research Laboratory.

**Left:** Cullman and his wife, Dorothy, at the Garden in 2004

Lab photos: Mekea Hurwitz