

Herbarium at the Bayer Center

February 23, 2026

We really hit the jackpot today! Normally we'd be out on some trail braving the cold (the temperature stayed around the freezing mark all day today). But instead we were inside a warm botanical candy store feasting on specialties that our Missouri Botanical Garden is world-famous for.

It seems that our David Steinmeyer had somehow set-up this "behind-the scenes" tour for us. We all met inside the lobby of the Missouri Botanical Garden as we have done many times in the past. However this time, after everybody had gathered together, we went back outside to our cars and drove a few short blocks westward on Shaw to the Bayer Center. There we were greeted by a cheerful and very knowledgeable Lauren Boyle who led us on the tour.

This was one of those rare days when everything went right. As we waited in the beautiful and spacious Bayer lobby, John made a funny comment to Lauren about a mint plant that the researcher Aaron Floden had spoken about. Lauren then excused herself, went upstairs to find Aaron, and the next thing you know we were in the Herbarium with Aaron himself sharing with us the research he is doing on mint plants! It was like being in a dream! He was showing us stacks of plant vouchers as we asked him all kinds of questions. We were probably with Aaron a good half hour before Lauren whisked us off to our next stop on the tour.

Lauren explained to us that some 40,000 plant specimens go in and out of the Center every year. She explained how incoming material has to go into a freezer right away. They always have to be on the lookout for tiny insects that can cause great damage to their entire operation. And some of their specimens are very old, starting at 1692. We even saw a specimen collected by Charles Darwin!

Next we toured their library. Not only do they have every botanical book imaginable, but they also have plenty of non-science books in which a plant name is mentioned – even Shakespeare plays! Somebody in our group said that they could happily spend the rest of their life here. We were all probably thinking the same thing. (From a distance, the herbarium and the library look similar because they both utilize a mobile shelving system to make best use of space. The big aisle-long shelving units move on tracks!)

Although it probably wasn't on Lauren's agenda, we found our way into the Book Conservator's workroom. Susie Cobbledick graciously showed us how she repairs damaged books. She showed us the materials she uses to mend pages and rebuild spines. If we could have, we would have stayed there all day in utter fascination. But Lauren had yet more wonders to show us.

What a privilege it was to come here! Thanks to David Steinmeyer for setting-up the tour and to David Bogler (a 30-year MOBOT researcher) who helped facilitate things, and of course to our leader John Oliver for making it all a reality. When we were leaving, our wonderful host Lauren Boyle invited us to come back again someday. For sure, we'll all be looking forward to it!

There were 20 of us botanists who had the good fortune to attend this special tour. We are (in alphabetical order):

Kathy Bildner, Steve Bizub, David Bogler, Tom and Eileen Buescher, Jerry Castillon, Wayne Clark, Christine Ellis, Ann Esswein, Karen Gabbert, Michael Laschober, Len Meier, Burt Noll, John Oliver, Anne Rankin, David Steinmeyer, George Van Brunt, Elaine Wolshock, Matthew Wolshock, and Richard Wolshock.