For more than 30 years, Charles Harbison—‘Harbie’ to his friends, which included everyone who knew him—was the primary spokesman for natural history inquiries in San Diego County, California. Possibly no person was more instrumental in the early development of young biologists on the Pacific Coast, and several of his protégés became lifelong lepidopterists. Although he was not primarily a lepidopterist, he was a member of our Society for 24 years beginning in the 1950s and attended many Pacific Slope Section meetings. He organized and hosted two of these at the San Diego Natural History Museum (SDNHM), in 1955 and 1965. The former was just the second meeting following organization of the Pacific Slope group. It was well attended and featured an immensely successful and memorable field trip to the desert following late summer rains, and it was instrumental in establishing the popularity of the meetings. In 1982, Harbison was the Comstock Award honoree at the Pacific Slope Meeting.

Charles Harbison was born in National City, just south of San Diego, in January 1904, into a pioneer family in San Diego history. His grandfather, John S. Harbison, was one of the earliest successful beekeepers in California, in the Sacramento Valley in the 1850s. In 1869 he moved to San Diego and by 1874 moved to the area that is now called Harbison Canyon, in the foothills east of San Diego, where he developed a large bee range. He eventually operated six apiaries with 2,000–3,000 hives, and according to Wikipedia, within seven years he was the largest producer of honey in the world, shipping carloads to Chicago and other eastern cities. Charles’ father settled in National City in the1870s, and in 1908 moved the family to the Imperial Valley, where he owned a turkey ranch near Seeley. Harbie recalled that his interest in insects began in his first year at El Centro High School, and he made his first collections there and at the Johnson Ranch near the town of Boulevard in the mountains of eastern San Diego County, where the family spent parts of the summers. His father also operated tourist trips, and young Charles helped run trips into northern Baja California, where he had his first experiences in the region. By 1919, the family returned to the San Diego area, and he graduated from Sweetwater High School in Chula Vista in 1923. Harbie then took courses at San Diego Normal School (now California State University, San Diego), before moving to Los Angeles, where he spent five years working for the Division of Nature Study of the Los Angeles City Schools. There he continued his formal education, taking night courses at the University of California, Southern Branch (now UCLA).

Harbison entered U. C. Berkeley, in spring 1932 as a junior and studied entomology under Profs. E. O. Essig, S. B. Freeborn, and W. B. Hermas and invertebrate zoology under Joseph Grinnell. Economic times were so poor that the summer field course, which was required of entomology major undergraduates from the 1920s until 1970, consisted of an encampment near Vacaville in the Sacramento Valley, where the students studied effects of Buckeye blossoms on honeybees, using pollen grain comparisons. Even so, after retirement Harbie said he often wondered if he ever had a happier time than his first year at Berkeley. He graduated with a B. S. in entomology in May 1933;