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## THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB A HALF-CENTURY AGO AND LATER

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EVEN such a palaeozoic as I do not, from my own experience, recall the founding of this club, but from a brief historical sketch in *Rhodora*<sup>2</sup> by Emile F. Williams I learn that when W. H. Manning had called together a group of local botanists for consultation about a flora of the Metropolitan Parks, all were surprised and shocked to find how unacquainted with one another most of them were. Accordingly, at a later meeting, on December 10, 1895, at the house of Professor W. G. Farlow in Cambridge (now the headquarters of the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences), the present organization was formed, with Farlow as the first president, the purpose being, as stated in the by-laws, "the promotion of social intercourse and the dissemination [an appropriate botanical metaphor] of local and general information among gentlemen interested in the flora of New England." The term "gentlemen" was intended to emphasize (1) the distinctly staminate character of the group, which was to be no afternoon gathering associated with tea-cups and lumps of sugar, and (2) a certain standard of presentability and behavior.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rewritten from remarks at the five hundredth meeting of the club, February 2, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> *Rhod.* 1 (1899), 37-39.

<sup>3</sup> Years later seven botanists arrived late one evening, hungry, tired, and shabby, from a long-delayed train, at the chief hotel in Halifax, N. S., where the leader, Fernald, had wired for accommodations for the party. Finding that we were to be crowded into a small space, two in a bed, Fernald vigorously protested that he had telegraphed for rooms for seven *gentlemen*. "Gentlemen don't sleep two in a bed; mill hands do, but not gentlemen." Though the rest of us were so tired that we would have slept *seven* in a bed, he maintained his point, and we were each given a room.



Williams remarks:<sup>4</sup> "It speaks well for the cultivation of the American business class that it contributes to the club almost as many members as the professional botanists themselves, the remainder of the membership comprising teachers, . . . physicians, lawyers, literary men, and men of leisure, but not of idleness, this favored class furnishing some of the most efficient members of the club."

At first the meetings were held in the houses of members, but attendance so increased that by 1896 the club moved to the St. Botolph Club on Commonwealth Avenue (where I first knew it), in 1903 to the Hotel Brunswick, in 1906 to the Twentieth Century Club on Joy St., and in 1923 to the house of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

As an undergraduate I had been a member of the old Harvard Natural History Society, where I had known C. H. Knowlton, LeRoy Andrews, J. M. Hunnewell, and M. L. Fernald, the last named being still an assistant in the Gray Herbarium. I had also subscribed to *Rhodora*, in the third volume of which (July, 1901) Walter Deane described a white-fruited *Gaylussacia*. That same month there was brought to my notice a white-fruited high-bush blueberry bush in a pasture a mile from my house in Andover, Mass., and I was so bold as to send specimens of it to Mr. Deane, who speedily published it in *Rhodora*<sup>5</sup> as a new form, *Vaccinium corymbosum* L., var. *atrococcum* Gray, f. *leucococcum*<sup>6</sup> Deane. Further, when Deane learned that I was a college student on my vacation he invited me to come to see him in Cambridge in the fall, and, after closer acquaintance, took me as his guest on May 2, 1902, to the Club meeting at the St. Botolph Club, at which Dr. R. G. Leavitt of the Ames Laboratory spoke (morphologically) on *Drosera* and Professor B. L. Robinson—always known as "Dr. Robinson"—discussed (taxonomically) the genus *Hypericum*. In December, 1902, I was elected a member of the Club—an indirect result, it would seem, of the abnormal pigmentation of a few blueberries!

The Club has been very conservative in its ritual<sup>7</sup> as well as in its membership, so that the early meetings in this century in

<sup>4</sup> *L. c.*

<sup>5</sup> *Rhod.* 3 (Nov., 1901), 265.

<sup>6</sup> Not, as *Gray's Manual*, 8th edition, states, f. *leucocarpum*.

<sup>7</sup> Among conservative touches is the appointment, at elections of officers or members, of "scrutineers" rather than anything so commonplace as "tellers."



many respects resembled those of the present day: an irregular and straggling assembling for conversation and exchange of specimens between 7:30 and 8:00 p. m., during which time some members would probably try to secure the identification of puzzling specimens from Messrs. Robinson, Fernald, or—for the fungi—Hollis Webster. The call to order came about 8:00, with the President seated at the table in front, flanked, as now, by the Recording Secretary at his left and the Corresponding Secretary at his right, the Vice-President and the Treasurer having never been so featured. After the formal papers and various short and impromptu notes from the floor there followed an ample collation. A long table, loaded with viands, such as chicken croquettes, cold joints, salads, escalloped oysters, and ice-cream, was replenished by one or two bustling waiters. Where Emile F. Williams was, there one was sure of something worth eating! Austerity came with his demise and with the economies of the First World War.

Sketches of the chief officers and of one or two prominent members may make clearer the picture of the Club as a whole, and I shall start with those at the head table.

The President, Professor Roland Thaxter, was the son of Celia Thaxter, the writer and poetess of the Isles of Shoals, though he himself was more firmly rooted on the mainland at Kittery, Maine, where he had a summer cottage with a lawn upon which seemed to grow specimens of all the supposedly rare cryptogams which enthusiastic and ambitious students brought in to him from all sources for his approbation. He was a serious, brown-bearded man,<sup>8</sup> with a cool New England reticence and a cautious understatement which effectively deflated any over-exuberant enthusiasms of the inexperienced. From friends of mine who were his pupils I gathered details which increased the natural awe in which one would regard so august a personage.

(Digression on the common house-fly.) This aggressive and pertinacious animal (the existence of which has, from antiquity, constituted one of the greatest obstacles to belief in a beneficent divine providence) in late summer loses its *élan vital*, and clings feebly to walls and ceilings, not, as I am told, because of cold

<sup>8</sup> Many members then wore beards or side-whiskers; one of the last, if not the very last, disappeared with the death of Merritt Fernald.



weather, but from the growth upon its shins of a vegetable parasite of the genus *Laboulbenia*. In our present sadly commercialized age we might try to raise, by selection, hybridization, or by some bonus, incentive, or retiring allowance, a bigger, better, busier *Laboulbenia*, and to get her more promptly on the job. But Roland Thaxter was reputed to have said that if any problem upon which he was engaged proved susceptible of any economic application he should immediately lose all interest in it. Nature, then, had to take its course, while this greatest Laboulbeniaceologist of the Charles River basin, if not of Eastern Massachusetts, kept his escutcheon untarnished—save by fly-specks. So Aristotle says:<sup>9</sup> "To be always seeking after the useful does not become free and exalted souls." (End of digression on the fly.)

At the President's left, as now, sat the Recording Secretary. In 1902 this functionary was Emile Francis Williams, born in France, and (at that time) a stout, jolly bachelor, a prosperous importer of Oriental rugs, a thoroughly competent epicure, and a devotee of the theatre.<sup>10</sup> His minutes were entertaining to hear, partly from their breezy humor and the gusto with which he read them, and partly from the entanglement of his tongue in the pronunciation of the longer scientific names. As a field collector he prepared beautiful specimens for his large herbarium, and introduced a new method of folding plants too long for an herbarium sheet, by inserting in the pressing papers a thin sheet of metal to hold the recalcitrant leaves and twigs in place during the drying process.<sup>11</sup> While Thaxter intensively scrutinized his lawn at Kittery, Williams made trips, usually with companions, like the Faxon brothers, Judge Churchill, or Fernald, to the White Mountains or to new localities, like Katahdin or Gaspé.<sup>12</sup>

At the President's right sat the Corresponding Secretary, Edward Lothrop Rand—called Ned Rand in distinction from his

<sup>9</sup> *Politics*, 8, 3.

<sup>10</sup> His noteworthy scrapbooks, with programmes of the first performances of every play in Boston worth seeing, were shown me after his death by his widow, who gave them, I believe, to the theatre collection in Widener Library of Harvard University.

<sup>11</sup> Fernald also introduced improvements in technique, including the folding of the bottom over the top instead of the top over the bottom in case of sprawling specimens, such as grasses and sedges. He also devised the use of "salivators" for holding delicate leaves and petals open during drying.

<sup>12</sup> A posthumous article by Fernald in *Rhod.* 53 (1951), 1-6, describes the first expedition of Fernald and Williams to the Gaspé peninsula.



contemporary member Harry Seaton Rand,—a Boston lawyer who lived in a very retired house at Porter Square in North Cambridge, approached through a long garden walk where one seemed to leave behind all the noises of the town. He was a lean, dark-complexioned man, of laconic utterance but abounding and ready wit, both dry and more explosive, with which he liked at times to tease his intimates, especially Walter Deane, upon whom he wrote the classic verses sometimes read at the celebrations of this club, beginning "In the youth of Walter Deane." Rand was a keen and tireless collector in a limited district, who made Mt. Desert Island perhaps the most intensively collected area of its size in New England, and who, assisted by J. H. Redfield and encouraged by President Eliot, published the standard flora of that island.

Appearances are often deceptive, but the membership of the Club, as seen at its meetings, gave the impression of greater age than at present, partly by the prominence of beards and partly because there were fewer graduate students than today, H. H. Bartlett, S. F. Blake, A. H. Moore, and Harold St. John being among the few nearly contemporaneous with myself whom I can now recall. As a result of fewer students there was a larger proportion of permanent members, with many whose regularity in attendance at meetings was conspicuous, an especially notable case being that of J. F. Collins, the bryologist from Brown University—a most helpful and practical companion on field expeditions,—who, despite the weather, never failed to come up from Providence for the monthly meetings. Many of the members had their own herbaria, accounts of some of which may be found in the successive instalments of Miss Mary A. Day's articles on the Herbaria of New England in the third volume of *Rhodora*. There was competition, both quantitative and qualitative, between these different collectors, the largest herbaria, I should say, being those of Deane and Williams, and the finest specimens, in general, being those prepared by Fernald, Williams, R. A. Ware, and (later) C. F. Batchelder. These private herbaria became, in many instances, important feeders for the Gray Herbarium and those of the Club and the Boston Society of Natural History, though some, like that of J. R. Churchill, went farther afield. Some of the members exchanged widely, particu-



larly with other regions in the range of *Gray's Manual*, but Judge Churchill admitted to his herbarium only specimens culled by his own hand.

Many of the members were amateurs, who had taken up botany, sometimes in middle life, as an avocation from their professions in other fields; for example the wealthy and generous banker N. T. Kidder; three judges: J. R. Churchill ("the judge" *par excellence*, botanically speaking, though perhaps their Honors Dodge and Jenny may have outranked him juridically); lawyers like E. L. Rand; physicians like Doctors Kennedy, Webster, and (the elder) Cheever; educators like President Brainerd of Middlebury College, Headmaster W. L. W. Field of Milton Academy, and Hollis Webster of Cambridge; an artist in the person of F. Schuyler Mathews—an important illustrator for the seventh edition of *Gray's Manual*; a country store-keeper, that shrewd and lank Yankee C. H. Bissell, of Southington, Connecticut; and business men like Williams and R. A. Ware. Several were specialists in other scientific areas: J. H. Sears in geology, H. P. Kelsey and W. P. Rich in horticulture—the latter a constant explorer of the flora of the Boston dumps—, William Brewster and Walter Deane in ornithology, J. H. Emerton in spiders, and F. F. Forbes, an official in the Brookline waterworks, who from its ditches collected diatoms. These varied types converged somewhat into the old-fashioned naturalist, men like Gilbert White of Selborne, England, and Henry D. Thoreau of Concord; observers of trees, herbs, birds, rocks, weather, and often of men, who were able to talk (and sometimes to write) so as to interest others in what had interested them. They were still unafraid of experts; men of the field rather than of the laboratory,<sup>13</sup> with the originality of view and picturesqueness often found in those who are free from the taboos of professional etiquette, and with an enthusiasm which has proved a strong motive force in the development of this club.

On the other hand, the Club in the period under discussion was more narrowly concerned than today with the area of New England. The name of its organ, *Rhodora*, was chosen to indicate, in a general way, the geographic range of articles for which

<sup>13</sup> Professor Fernald used to maintain that the laboratory kills most of a student's natural interest in the world around him.



it was designed. This range expanded, however, with the extension of interest of Professor Fernald, to Gaspé, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Lake Superior, and, finally, tidewater Virginia. Several of the members had published local floras, e. g., in addition to Rand and Redfield for Mt. Desert, L. L. Dame and F. S. Collins (of the old Middlesex Institute at Malden) for Middlesex County, John Robinson for Essex County, Ralph Hoffman for Berkshire County, C. H. Bissell for Southington, Connecticut, and G. G. Kennedy for Willoughby, Vermont.\* Advance studies or additions for these floristic undertakings frequently first appeared in remarks or papers at the Club meetings and later in the pages of *Rhodora*, as well as topical or monographic treatments of particular groups of plants. I well recall F. F. Forbes's beautiful slides of diatoms and President Brainerd's spirited discussions of hybridity in *Viola*, in which he developed the "love-life" of these seemingly innocent plants with almost the breathless thrill of an unfolding detective story. Illustrated talks were in the earlier years fewer than now, but with the exploration of regions unfamiliar to most of the members, and particularly with the excellent photographs taken by Fernald and J. F. Collins in Gaspé and Newfoundland, such became more frequent. Certainly there was much more in the early years of the exhibition of specimens hung up on the nets for discussion and later inspection.

The most influential member of the Club, over a long series of years, was undoubtedly Merritt Fernald, but since his life, personality, and work have been rather fully treated elsewhere I shall not discuss him further in this paper, but out of the remaining members select for brief mention two others as being especially typical.

Walter Deane was the son of a distinguished historian, Charles Deane. After teaching in St. Mark's School he married the daughter of its headmaster, Dr. Coolidge. The Deanes lived in a double house on Brewster St. in Cambridge, connected by an inside door with the Coolidges on the other side of the wall, and after the deaths of Dr. and Mrs. Coolidge the Deane household expanded into both houses, which were crowded to the roof with

\* Professor Pease has modestly omitted reference to his own "Vascular Flora of Coös County, New Hampshire," published in 1924.—Eds.



books, pictures, and herbarium cases. Deane had the time and a passion for extreme documentation (perhaps an inheritance from his historian-father?), and his pictures were labelled on the back with the names of artists, donors, owners, subjects, and criticisms made by those who had seen them. Hundreds of his herbarium sheets were similarly marked with the visas of Robinson, Fernald, L. H. Bailey, and many others, earlier and later. Ned Rand made somewhat merry over this documentary habit, and once asked me, with a twinkle in his eye, how valuable today I thought that the visa of Dr. Gray on a sheet of *Antennaria* would be. Deane's principal activity was as curator in the private ornithological museum of William Brewster in the Brewster garden across the street from his house. His own herbarium, of perhaps 40,000 sheets, was in part composed of his own collections, chiefly at Whitefield and later at Shelburne, N. H., in part of generous gifts of duplicates from Judge Churchill, and in part from other correspondents. He did much work on it himself and always went into all points in great detail, though usually bowing to the judgment of experts. Active in the Nuttall Ornithological Club and for many years secretary of the Old Cambridge Shakespeare Association, he devoted also to this Club much time and loyal attention. A childless man with a most fatherly manner, he always beamed with geniality and enthusiasm, and he was in his day probably the most generally beloved member of the Club.

Joseph Richmond Churchill, of Meeting House Hill in Dorchester, was for sixty years judge in a municipal court. He was a portly man, with grey sidewhiskers and a calm, unhurried look and manner. He collected in many parts of the *Manual* range, showing considerable initiative in selecting the unusual places to which he went—often with his wife and daughter—but on an expedition with other men the party was often a good deal delayed because he must get a specimen of each rarity found but must also collect this by plucking it with his own hands, sometimes while boosted up to a ledge on the back of Fernald or some other stalwart companion. I several times collected with him in the field, and remember very clearly a trip in the Blue Hills near Milton, on which we passed a field conspicuously placarded with "No Trespassing" signs. The judge caught sight of a



rather rare weed among the grain, and walked to the fence to view it more closely. He looked at the weed and then at the signs, and then at the weed again, and I could see the external evidences of a severe internal conflict between the judge and the botanist. The botanist won, and he explained to me that he was probably really doing a favor to the landowner by removing this weed before it spread and became a pest.

These are but a few of many memories of the earlier period of the Club, an age not necessarily better or worse than the present, but though in some external details our organization was then much like that of today, yet in other details, of human personalities, the Club stood in considerable contrast at various points. As Tennyson remarks,

God fulfills himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

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## A NEW HEUCHERA FROM MISSOURI TOGETHER WITH SOME NOTES ON THE HEUCHERA PARVIFLORA GROUP

C. O. ROSENDAHL

A NUMBER of years ago Dr. Steyermark sent me a specimen of a *Heuchera* from Wayne County, Missouri which at the time Dr. Butters and I took to be a hybrid of *H. puberula*  $\times$  *H. americana* var. *hirsuticaulis*. Upon further examination of the material I became convinced that this surmise was wrong for I was unable to find any clear evidence of any admixture of var. *hirsuticaulis* in the assumed cross. Also it was manifest that the plant was closer allied to *H. parviflora* var. *Rugelii* than to the geographically more restricted *H. puberula*. Although it clearly differed from typical *Rugelii* in the densely glandular-villous petioles and stems, in the less open inflorescence with more numerous shorter pedicelled flowers I was nevertheless disposed to regard it only as a somewhat aberrant individual of this wide ranging variety. Later on Dr. Steyermark sent me more material and at the same time called attention to several vegetative and floral characters in which it differed from var. *Rugelii*. He suggested that it might prove to be something new.





Pease, Arthur Stanley. 1951. "The New England Botanical Club a half-century ago and later." *Rhodora* 53, 97–105.

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