

POSSIBLE EPONYMY OF THE GENERIC NAME *BRASENIA* SCHREB. (CABOMBACEAE).—The genus *Brasenia* Schreb. comprises only *B. schreberi* J.F. Gmel., water-shield, a floating-leaved aquatic species native from scattered tropical American localities north to the Alaska panhandle and the Gaspé Peninsula of Québec, and in eastern Asia at comparable latitudes, southern Africa, and eastern Australia. Standard floras and other references generally indicate that the generic name is “of uncertain origin” (Fernald 1950; similarly, “unexplained,” Britton 1901; “of unknown meaning,” Gleason 1952; “origin unknown,” Stone 1993, among others). The only suggestions of its derivation that I have encountered were Gray’s (1895) speculative “unexplained, perhaps named for some obscure botanist,” and Rafinesque’s (1828) more definite “from a German botanist, Brasen.” Rafinesque, however, provided no given name or initials, nor any other identifying data such as association with an institution, city, or any of the kingdoms or duchies into which Germany was divided at that time (admittedly not always feasible when boundaries were unstable and political refugees were numerous), that would indicate that he was speculating any less than Gray as to the existence of such an individual.

Schreber’s (1789) publication of the name *Brasenia*, in keeping with the format of the successive editions of *Genera Plantarum*, included no statement as to the derivation of the name. Unless evidence is discovered in extant correspondence written by or to Schreber, therefore, it will remain impossible to be certain as to his basis for coining this name. Circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that the genus was named for Christoph Brasen, a Moravian missionary who collected botanical specimens in Greenland and Labrador.

Christoph Brasen was born 3 January 1738 at Ripen, Jutland (now Ribe, Denmark; the “new style” calendar was already in use there). As a missionary of the Moravian Church (Church of the United Brethren; Unitas Fratrum; Brüder-Gemeine), he served first at Godthåb (now Nûk), Greenland. In 1767 and 1768, he collected plant specimens in the vicinity of Godthåb Fjord (Porsild 1935). In 1771, by which time he had established a reputation as being “knowledgeable in botany,” he was selected to be superintendent of the mission to be founded at Nain, Labrador, to which he went that year with his wife, née Maria Catharina Federhahn, also from Ripen. Brasen brought the valuable expertise of a “skilled surgeon” to the new mission, and was already fluent in Inuktitut from his years in Greenland. On 15 September 1774, en route back to Nain from a reconnaissance voyage to the site where the Okak mission was subsequently established, Brasen’s



vessel was wrecked and he drowned in the attempt to reach shore (Anonymous 1835; Roemer et al. 1871; Davey 1905; Peacock 1976).

Brasen is known to have collected botanical specimens in Labrador because of those cited by Georg Heinrich Weber (1784), professor at Kiel, in his *Plantarum Minus Cognitarum Decuria*. (This work is sometimes attributed to Sebastian Grauer. According to Sprague [1922], Weber was the author of this work and of the new botanical names therein. Grauer, the "respondent," discussed or defended it as a requirement for his doctorate.) *Ribes glandulosum* (Grossulariaceae), described as a new species, was based on a specimen collected by Brasen in Labrador (Lysaght 1971).

Johann Christian Daniel von Schreber (1739–1810), who named the genus *Brasenia*, was professor of natural history and director of the botanical garden at Erlangen, Bavaria (Staffleu & Cowan 1985). He was one of many botanists of his time and later who acquired specimens collected by Moravian missionaries. Most such specimens were initially sent from the missions to the Moravian Church headquarters in Herrnhut, Saxony, where some of the officials were themselves active in botany and aware of the interest among botanists in specimens from distant parts of the world. From Herrnhut, some specimens were given to botanical scholars among the clergy and lay members of the Moravian Church, and some were sold to other botanists to raise funds for the missions. These recipients sometimes divided the collections further for exchange purposes. Schreber acquired specimens collected in Labrador by Benjamin Gottlieb Kohlmeister (1756–1844), one of the most important early contributors of botanical specimens from Labrador. Schreber did not publish upon these plants, but after his death the specimens were studied by Franz von Paula von Schrank, professor and director of the botanical garden at Munich, who published a paper on the flora of Labrador (Schrank 1818), which included an account of the history of these specimens (Pringle 1992).

The specimens from Schreber's herbarium do not indicate a direct link with Brasen, but they do indicate that during the latter part of the eighteenth century, Schreber communicated with Moravian churchmen who were interested in botany, from whom he acquired specimens collected by at least one of the Moravian missionaries in Labrador. It seems quite likely that he learned from his Moravian correspondents that one of the missionaries in Labrador, whose own knowledge in botany had been respected and who had contributed specimens for botanical research, had died. Such a message might have included a suggestion that, if and when Schreber discovered a plant new to science, it might be named as a memorial to this early botanical collector. None of the Labrador specimens acquired by



Schreber represented an unnamed genus, so Schreber could not name a genus native to Labrador for Brasen, but he was able to give such a name to a genus native to North America, in (according to Stafleu & Cowan 1985) his first major botanical publication following Brasen's death. No specimens were cited by Schreber (1789), but the specimens from his herbarium now at Munich (M) might be searched for any that would indicate the basis of his knowledge of *Brasenia* and the source of any specimens of that genus that Schreber might have acquired.—James S. Pringle, Royal Botanical Gardens, Box 399, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8N 3H8.

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