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MARIA L. OWEN.

WALTER DEANE.

(With portrait.)

ANOTHER botanist long associated with the study of New England plants has passed away, and we mourn the loss of one always keenly devoted to her favorite pursuit and a painstaking student of the Nantucket flora. Those of us who were privileged to enjoy her warm friendship will always miss her kindly words and enthusiastic correspondence. Yet we must be grateful that this friend and fellow student reached a ripe old age and enjoyed to the last good health, while she made her valuable contributions on the New England flora.

Mrs. Maria L. Owen, as the botanical world always knew her, died in Plandome, Long Island, at the home of her daughter, Mrs. James Sullivan, on June 8, 1913, at the advanced age of eighty-eight years. She was born on the Island of Nantucket, Massachusetts, on February 13, 1825. Her full name was Maria Louise Tallant,<sup>1</sup> and she was the daughter of Eben Weld Tallant and Nancy Coffin. Through her father she was descended from Hugh Tallant, the early New England settler from Ireland, mentioned by Whittier in the "Sycamores," and from the prominent Weld family of Roxbury, Massachusetts. Through her mother she traced her descent from Tristram Coffin and others of the early settlers of Nantucket.

Through the maternal branch of her grandfather Coffin, Mrs. Owen

<sup>1</sup> Miss Helen A. Gardner writes me from Nantucket under date of August 1, 1914; "The only record of Mrs. Owen's full name is a copy of The Census of 1830. There it is given Maria Louise Tallant. Age 5 years." Mrs. Henry P. Tallant writes that Mrs. Owen always spelled her middle name Louisa.



was related to Benjamin Franklin and Daniel Webster and she related the following amusing story to the writer in a letter dated December 22, 1897. After saying that it was not necessary to thank her every time she sent a trifling specimen or botanical note she continued, "I recall my cousin (somewhat removed) Benjamin Franklin's suggestion to his father to ask a blessing over the whole barrel of pork instead of seeking it all winter long for the portions that appeared on the table,—an example that you can follow. The Doctor is not my own first cousin, because I live too late in the centuries, but two of my ancestors, one on my grandfather's side and the other on my grandmother's, stood in exactly that relation to him." Mrs. Owen had a keen sense of humor that constantly cropped out in her letters.

In regard to some of her ancestors she writes under date of November 17, 1895, "I am eligible to the same societies [Colonial Dames, etc.] on other grounds. Four pilgrim fathers and mothers, and back of them John Robinson, the Leyden pastor, ministers and elders in Boston and Salem of the very earliest settlers, and a very near relationship to Benj. Franklin are some of the qualifications I should put forth. I am content for the present, however, with being a Daughter of the American Revolution."

She attended the Nantucket "Coffin School," founded by Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin, her grandfather's cousin. It was a kind of high-school devoted to the classics and incidentally free to all members of the Coffin family, but a private school to all others. It was endowed by the Admiral and is still in existence, though its course of instruction has been changed. Mrs. Owen's grandfather Coffin was the first president of the trustees of the school. She also attended the private school of her uncle, Rev. Cyrus Pierce, and, in 1838, when the High School was opened, with him as principal, Maria Tallant was one of the thirty-five pupils.

Mrs. Owen's early life was passed in Nantucket and she seems to have always been fond of the flowers about her. Her aunt, Mrs. Pierce, was a good botanist, and it was natural that, surrounded by such influences the child should imbibe the taste for that science. Her mother and her sisters were all women of marked ability and of botanical tastes and the daughter Maria with her remarkable memory and scientific turn of mind went farther than her predecessors. Her interest never flagged throughout her long life. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. Henry P. Tallant of Philadelphia, very near and dear to Mrs.



Owen, writes, "Maria might very well have inherited a taste for outdoor life from old Hugh. He evidently was fond of trees for he planted the row of sycamores at his home in Haverill [Massachusetts], and all the Tallants I ever knew loved nature and were sportsmen and outdoors people. One cousin at Nantucket scoured the waters there for sea animals for an aquarium. The Tallants, also, had a quiet persistence, so that once started on a study they never gave it up, but would keep on in spite of all discouragements."

In regard to her strong constitution and freedom from those physical ailments that hamper the botanist who must be much afield, Mrs. Owen writes on March 28, 1905, "I owe my almost unbroken health to a grandmother and two grandfathers who lived in the same fortunate condition to the ages of 76, 79 and 86 respectively, and still more perhaps to the great-grandfather who lived to be 108, and in his old age could put his hands on the near horse of two standing side by side and leap over them both. To him also I doubtless owe largely the happy disposition and the elastic spirits that have come right up after many of the trials that seem to be appointed for all, for he

"Delved by day and sang by night  
With a hand that never wearied,  
And a heart forever light,"

and passed through his long life

"With [his] eyes brimful of laughter,  
And [his] mouth as full of song."

Owing so much to my forebears I am trying to be a good ancestress myself, and pass along the blessings I have received."

Her letters teem with deep devotion to her native home and are full of tender love for the flora of the island, and, though she left the spot at a comparatively early age, she never ceased to regard Nantucket as her true home, and constant were the visits she made there to her dear island friends.

At one time Mrs. Owen taught in the school of George B. Emerson in Boston, and in 1845, 1846, and 1847 she was in South Boston teaching at the Perkins Institution for the Blind when Dr. Samuel G. Howe was superintendent. It was at the latter place that she met her future husband, Dr. Varillas L. Owen, who was Dr. Howe's secretary. Later she had a private school in Nantucket, which she left to become an assistant in the Nantucket High School.



On November 23, 1853, Maria Tallant was married in Nantucket to Dr. Owen and they went at once to Springfield, Massachusetts. Her life here of fifty years or more was one of continued activity. For years a Shakespeare Society met at her house and it was her delight to read and discuss the works of the great poet and other writers of note. During a portion of her life in Springfield, Mrs. Owen was actively engaged in teaching and I am glad to give the testimony of Miss Caroline Gray Soule of Brookline, Massachusetts, who was one of her pupils at that time. She says, "In the 'early seventies' Mrs. Owen taught botany and French in one private school in Springfield, and, two years later, astronomy and physical geography in another. She was a most interesting and inspiring teacher especially in botany, astronomy, and physical geography, which were to her all alive and active, not mere masses of scientific facts to be committed to memory.

"The growth and habits of a plant, its power of adaptation to environment, &c, were far more to her than the best mounted specimen, though she valued the herbarium for its practical uses.

"She knew how to ask questions, as well as to answer them, and to answer her questions satisfactorily to her was training in accuracy of observation, exactness of description, and use of English. No slipshod expression ever passed uncriticised, no careless observation or presentation of facts was left uncorrected in her class. She made her pupils really feel the scientific value of truth."

The Women's Club, founded in 1884, was another organization in which she was a prominent and efficient worker, its president, and later its honorary president. She writes on November 9, 1893, "From November through April our Women's Club takes much of my time; anything to be done for that takes precedence of almost everything else. I am president for the tenth year."

It is, however, of her botanical work that I shall speak especially. She was a ready writer and contributed many articles on botanical subjects to various papers, while the journal RHODORA occasionally received contributions from her pen. The Springfield Botanical Society, founded in 1876, owes its existence to Mrs. Owen and she has written a very bright account of its beginnings in the Thirtieth Annual Report of the Society, published April 19, 1907. After holding for many years the office of president, she retired from that onerous position and remained its honorary president till her death. Its members can testify to her zeal and efficiency in promoting its interests.



Whatever Mrs. Owen undertook she entered into with all her heart and she never failed to inspire those with whom she came into contact with some of her own enthusiasm. She was blessed with many friends, all ready and anxious to learn from her and to aid her in whatever way it was possible. And so she had many keen helpers in her various undertakings, and this was especially the case in her studies of the Nantucket flora, with which botanists in general, and especially those not personally acquainted with her will chiefly associate her; and indeed those of us who enjoyed a long acquaintance with her fully realize what a large share of her botanical activities the fair island claimed. A work on this subject had long been planned, and, for many years, she patiently and enthusiastically covered the island in her researches, referring all doubtful species to those in authority and enlisting under her banner those botanical friends who could visit the island and scour its moors and ponds for species new to her list, and venture into treacherous bogs where Mrs. Owen said she could not be expected to go. In this way many an added species was found and welcomed by her with her customary enthusiasm. To those who were privileged to enjoy a long and friendly correspondence with her it will always be a source of great gratification to recall the lively interest that each letter showed at a new discovery or extension of range. "Ecce Tillaea simplex!" was the way she began a letter on August 27, 1894, to the writer, when she announced the rediscovery of this choice plant in Nantucket three days before by Mrs. Mabel P. Robinson.<sup>1</sup> It had there remained hidden from botanists for sixty-five years, ever since William Oakes reported it in 1829.

Mrs. Owen's principal contributions to botany, outside of the various articles that have appeared in our journals from time to time, are two in number both relating to the island. The first is a "Catalogue of Plants growing without Cultivation on the Island of Nantucket" in Edward K. Godfrey's "The Island of Nantucket, its history, people, agriculture, botany, conchology and geology with maps to the town and island," published by Lee and Shepard in Boston in 1882. It is a small guide book of 365 pages and is extremely interesting, but we are especially concerned with the botanical part. This occupies pages 38 to 47 inclusive and consists of an introduction and a list. As the work is rare and scarcely known to many of the botanists of to-day,

<sup>1</sup> Botanical Gazette, xx, 80-81, 1895.



and as the introduction is of special interest, I venture to quote it in full. Mrs. Owen says, "At Mr. Godfrey's request, I have with much pleasure prepared the following catalogue. It is far from complete, being based upon collections made over thirty years ago, when I had made no study of the grasses and sedges, and when I had no thoughts of publishing. Still, in this imperfect form it will be of use to botanists, and the number of plants rare in New England which it contains, shows what pleasing discoveries are probably still to be made by exhaustive explorations.

"I hope to bring out, as soon as I have sufficient material, a more complete list to be published by itself, with such notes on the rarer plants as may be of interest. For this I ask the co-operation of all botanists, resident or visiting on the island, and I shall be extremely obliged for names and localities of additional species. To make the list more serviceable and authentic, it is desirable to have specimens of the new discoveries, for preservation in an herbarium of the island plants, which, if formed, will be freely accessible to botanists.

"Information is particularly desired about *Andromeda Mariana*, *Habenaria ciliaris*, and the *Tillaea*, *Calluna*, *Erica*, *Onosmodium*, *Mertensia*, *Ceratophyllum*, *Cypripedium*, and *Chara* of the catalogue. Some of these are represented so far by one single plant; and of others reported by older botanists, no one now living knows the locality.

"I am under obligations to several friends for help in this work, and must mention especially that I owe the list of algae to Mr. F. S. Collins, who drew it up from specimens principally collected by himself and Mr. L. L. Dame of Medford.

"The few miscellaneous cryptogams with which the list closes appeal to friendly specialists for re-enforcements; without such aid they will have to go into the next edition as lonely as they are now.

Maria L. Owen."

Then follows the Catalogue of Plants. They are listed in systematic order by their scientific names only, and without comments. There are just 500 species and varieties, and one form. This is certainly very creditable when we consider that the list was founded mainly on species collected before 1852 when Mrs. Owen was about twenty-five years old. It was the result chiefly of the enthusiastic study of plants in her younger days at a time when botanists and botanical centers where difficult species could be determined were fewer in number.



In 1888 appeared the work Mrs. Owen had so earnestly been preparing, "A Catalogue of Plants growing without cultivation in the County of Nantucket, Mass.," published in Northampton, Massachusetts, by the Gazette Printing Company. The six years that intervened between these two publications were busy ones. She enlisted many botanists to aid her in securing additions to her list and further information in regard to known species; she carried on a large correspondence; and she sent her doubtful species to proper authorities for accurate determination. It was the good fortune of the writer to witness much of this enthusiasm in his visits to the Island to aid the cause, in company with Judge J. R. Churchill of Dorchester, Massachusetts, and Rev. Dr. Thomas Morong of Ashland, Massachusetts. It is a work that reflects much credit upon its author and will always remain a true representation of the knowledge of the flora of the Island at that time.

The Catalogue contains a preface giving a description of the Island and of the botanical work done upon it and of the botanists who had aided her. The annotated list covers 75 pages, embracing 787 species and varieties, and one form, and includes a list of marine algae. This is an increase of nearly 300 over the 1882 list, while the notes accompanying the species lend added interest and information to the work. In this list Mrs. Owen was enabled to report *Onosmodium virginianum* and *Ceratophyllum demersum* from authentic specimens, discovered since the publication of the former list where the names were cited on the authority of President Hitchcock of Amherst fifty years before. It is to be regretted that Mrs. Owen did not make a complete herbarium of the plants represented in her list, but the species were verified always with great care, and the more uncommon ones were always preserved in some collections. She writes on January 15, 1887, that specimens scattered through herbaria are her authorities for the Flora. After its publication Mrs. Owen carefully kept track of the additional species that were discovered from time to time, the segregates that were made, the extensions of range, etc., and she always meant to publish these data, but advancing years compelled a relaxation in this pleasant but strenuous work.<sup>1</sup> Her botanical interests were broad and her trips to Europe and in her own neighborhood were enriched by her interest in the plants about her. Many a rarity she sent to her friends as the result of these excursions.

<sup>1</sup> The Flora of Nantucket is being published by Mr. E. P. Bicknell in the numbers of the Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club.



Dr. Owen died in 1897, but Mrs. Owen continued to reside in Springfield till 1907 when she moved to the home of her daughter in Plandome, Long Island. Here she lived till her death. It was the fading away of a happy old age, and the end came on a bright morning with the room flooded with sunshine, which she always loved, and filled with iris, columbine and corn flowers. She was a woman of strong faith and she lived true to the motto of her mother's family, "Post tenebris speramus lumen de lumine," which she loved to translate, "After the darkness we hope for light from the *source* of light."

Mrs. Owen had two children, Walter L. Owen, architect, deceased, and Amelia, wife of Dr. James Sullivan, who survives her.

In preparing this paper I wish to acknowledge the kind assistance of Mr. F. Schuyler Mathews of Cambridge, Massachusetts, Miss Caroline G. Soule of Brookline, Massachusetts, and Mrs. Henry P. Tallant of Philadelphia. Acknowledgments are also extended to the Springfield Botanical Society and the Springfield Art Museum for the loan of the plate for the portrait accompanying this article.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS.

## THE VARIATIONS OF *RANUNCULUS CYMBALARIA*.

M. L. FERNALD.

*Ranunculus Cymbalaria* Pursh, originally described from the saline marshes of Onondaga Lake, New York, is found in saline habitats in the northern or cooler areas of North America and Asia. In America it extends southward along the coasts to New Jersey and California and through the interior to western New York, Illinois, Texas and central Mexico; and it reappears in South America on the high Andes from Ecuador to Argentina (*R. tridentatus*, var. *minor* HBK.).

Throughout the greater portion of its range the species seems to be essentially uniform: a fleshy, strictly glabrous plant with small flowers (6-9 mm. broad) having the subequal sepals and petals 2-4 mm. long; the stamens in one or two rows and with subglobose anthers; and the head of young carpels 1.5-5 mm. high during anthesis (before the falling of the last petals and stamens). In this plant, which is the characteristic coastwise and northern form of the spe-





Deane, Walter. 1914. "MARIA L. OWEN." *Rhodora* 16, 153–160.

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