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Ralph C. Benedict 1883-1965

BENJAMIN R. ALLISON

In the American Fern Journal in 1954, Ralph Benedict wrote an obituary of Matthew D. Mann, Jr., at that time treasurer of the American Fern Society. He said, "Mr. Mann's death was a real loss to the fern world. He was so interested, and such a delightful, unassuming person." This statement applies well to Dr. Benedict; many others outside the fern world will miss him.

Born in Syracuse, N. Y., on June 14, 1883, he graduated from Syracuse University, and received his Ph.D. degree from Columbia University in 1911. He taught biology in various New York City high schools until 1931, when he became associate professor of biology in Brooklyn College. From 1937 until his retirement in 1953 he was a full professor; upon his retirement he became professor emeritus. He was a dedicated teacher, and a host of devoted, grateful students were among his friends. His physician during his last illness was a former student. The proprietor of a restaurant in Chinatown where he occasionally lunched with his fern friends was another.

Dr. Benedict was one of the organizers of the American Fern Society and a member since 1905. He served as president from 1952 to 1955. For 50 years he was a member of the editorial board of the American Fern Journal. His many interests included building up the living fern collections in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the New York Botanical Garden.

An account of his first research work in ferns in 1906 was written in a letter to his children on June 20, 1964. Part of this letter follows:

Volume 55, No. 4, of the JOURNAL, pp. 145-188, was issued January 21, 1966, not December 30, 1965, as listed in the Contents for Volume 55.

I have written, with Prof. W. H. Wagner of the Univ. of Michigan, who has had more students doing graduate work on ferns than I believe anyone else has ever had, what may be the last of the series on the Boston Fern work. I am glad to have what may be the end of my engagement now 50 years after I started this particular line of research. The revision of the fern treatment for the second edition of L. H. Bailey's "Encyclopedia of Horticulture" started me with maybe 100 different kinds of ferns to deal with; all were easy until I came to *Nephrolepis*. For some ten years I traced the origins of some scores that florists had produced, produced dozens of new kinds at the Brooklyn Garden, made repeated visits to growers from eastern Mass. to central Ohio, and south to Washington. I paid my way with grants of some \$600.00 mostly from the A.A.A.S., and before I finished had registered over 400 separate accessions, a good many of them duplicates. Collections were imported from France and England and collected for me in Florida and Puerto Rico.

Four main articles resulted and a score or so of shorter ones, some on a popular basis. I am writing this as a record to go along with the copies of the three main papers I recently sent to you.

Benedict made many other contributions to fern literature. The last was an article in the American Fern Journal in 1964 entitled "Ferns in the Florists' Trade in 1964."

The members of the Department of Biology of Brooklyn College after his death on August 5, 1965 passed resolutions praising his service "in many different capacities in the department, the College and the Community." He was a born teacher and was particularly interested in teaching teachers to teach. He believed that biology teachers should be not only masters of the technical and factual aspects of their subject matter, but also should be imbued with the humanitarian and philosophical implications of science. He was indeed a Humanist; he knew and loved people. His friendliness and humility added to his charm. On field trips when a beginner asked if oak ferns grew only under oak trees, or if the little dots on the back of the leaves were a disease, he patiently gave the answers. He was also a true naturalist. At his home on Lake George, where he spent his last years, he was a friend of the animals and birds, the woods, the brooks, and the hills. As he walked around his property, the birds perched on his shoulders, and his favorite skunk, Amber, visited him daily.

I talked with him the day before his operation, from which he did not recover, and he said, "I will be glad to have this over so I can get back and be cured by the birds and the ferns." If there is a place somewhere in the skies reserved for God's Noblemen, I am sure Ralph Benedict will be found in the front row.

HEWLETT, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK.

Two New Species of Ferns from the United States¹

W. H. WAGNER, JR.

During the course of a broad survey of "problem" fern groups in the United States a number of novelties have turned up; many of these are hybrids which seem to be sterile and incapable of normal reproduction. However, the two ferns to be described below, although probably of hybrid origin, do possess mechanisms for reproduction by spores, and indeed form sizeable populations extending over wide ranges. Both are "critical" species, in the sense that they show close similarities to other well-known ferns, and that is probably the reason they were heretofore overlooked.

POLYSTICHUM

Holly ferns of the north temperate regions have always presented a confusing picture to general taxonomists, especially the species with divided leaflets. Part of the problem has been nomenclatural (Alston, 1940), part the tendency of early authors to collect practically all of the bipinnate species under one taxon, *Polystichum aculeatum* (L.) Roth (Christensen,

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