

Montana's Pioneer Botanists. Exploring the Mountains and Prairies

Edited by Rachel Potter and Peter Lesica

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Review by Patricia Holmgren

Dr. Holmgren is Director Emerita of New York Botanical Garden Herbarium, where she was manager for over 32 years. In retirement, she continues as coordinator and editor of Index Herbariorum and as co-director and author of the Intermountain Flora project. She obtained her PhD at the University of Washington under the tutelage of C. Leo Hitchcock, who is featured in the book.

Hear ye, hear ye! Librarians, botanists, herbarium curators, historians, book aficionados! You are going to love *Montana's Pioneer Botanists*, a gold mine of information about botanical exploration in Montana, beginning with indigenous people and ending with Klaus Lackschewitz (1911-1995).

Editors Rachel Potter and Peter Lesica have produced a magnificent compendium of 31 historical essays written by 18 authors, many with a special connection to or knowledge of the botanist about whom they were writing. Photos of botanists and plants associated with them are skillfully interspersed within the essays.

Montana's Pioneer Botanists is dedicated to Arthur Kruckeberg (1920-2016) and Montana's botanists of today and tomorrow. The idea for a broader version of this topic began nearly 30 years ago when Art envisioned a book of biographies about historical Northwest plant hunters. He and Rhoda Love began collecting essays for what was to be called *Plant Hunters of the Pacific Northwest*. Peter Lesica agreed to be part of the project by collecting essays about Montana's botanists. The years rolled by without a sign of the book reaching fruition, which led Peter to move ahead. He asked Rachel Potter to join him, and *Montana's Pioneer Botanists* is the successful result of their collaborative effort.

This attractively designed book is organized in sections as follows: The Circle of Seasons (Montana's First Botanists [indigenous peoples]); Early 19th Century (Meriwether Lewis, Nathaniel J. Wyeth, Charles A. Geyer); Late 19th Century (David Lyall, Frank Tweedy, Sereno Watson, Hans Peter Gyllenbourg Koch, Robert Statham Williams, Francis Duncan Kelsey, Per Axel Rydberg); Early 20th Century (J. W. Blankinship, John Leiberg, Pliny Hawkins, Morton J. Elrod, Marcus Jones, Gertrude P. Norton, Joseph Edward Kirkwood, Paul C. Standley, Wilhelm Suksdorf, C. Leo Hitchcock, National Youth Administration; and Mid-Late 20th Century (Wilfred W. White, Frank Hubert Rose, William Edwin Booth, Frederick Hermann, LeRoy H. Harvey, Marie Mooar, Wilfred B. Schofield, Wally Albert, Klaus Lackschewitz).

Although many of the above names are familiar, you will be amazed at how much you learn about each. Did you know that Nathaniel Wyeth invented a method for easily

cutting ice into blocks when that was the only means of refrigeration? You will learn that Robert Statham Williams was always addressed by everyone as 'Mr. Williams.' The formality was breached only by Elizabeth Britton, Williams' colleague of 35 years at the New York Botanical Garden, who occasionally addressed him loudly as 'you damned old fool,' and he, in retaliation, called her an 'old hellcat!' You will learn that, although George Engelmann in St. Louis had arranged and underwritten the initial expenses of one of Charles A. Geyer's expeditions in return for receiving the materials collected, Geyer sent his collections to W. J. Hooker at Kew, causing Asa Gray to complain to Hooker about how "shabbily" Geyer had behaved. Robert Dorn tells us the William Edwin Booth read a newspaper and took a nap during part of Robert's oral exam. And on and on. This book is chock-full of interesting anecdotes.

Readers should not overlook an overriding theme throughout. These early naturalists understood the importance of documenting their work by preparing plant collections, which today form a significant part of our nation's herbaria. Their herbarium specimens, often prepared under difficult conditions, provide baseline data for the descriptions and geographic distributions of species growing in Montana. These collections serve as voucher records for what grew where and when it grew there.

Hearty congratulations to the editors and authors of *Montana's Pioneer Botanists* for presenting a fitting tribute to the early botanical explorers of the state.