



New book great read on botanists of Montana

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From the Native Americans to Morton Elrod, a new book, "Montana's Pioneer Botanists," takes a biographical look at 27 botanists and their impact on the field in Montana.

Editors Rachel Potter and Peter Lesica have crafted not a dry biographical tome, but a bright and lively read full of colorful photos, illustrations, and interesting stories about the early efforts to catalogue, identify, and study Montana's rich plant life and history. Eighteen authors, including Potter and Lesica, contributed to the book.

Potter said it took about five years to put the book together and gather the essays and photos. Some of the essays are 30 years old and she searched around the country for the historic photos. Potter and Lesica decided to put the essays together after they did a program of Glacier Park's botanists for the Park centennial in 2010.

Deb Dolan retouched all the old photos, and noted local photographer Dee Linnell Blank has a host of her excellent work in the book.

Native plants are woven into the very fabric of Montana. Native Americans relied on a host of plants for their livelihood, from the nutritious camas root, to the versatile "sarvisberry" which was harvested not only for its sweet fruit, but for its limbs, which were used to make tools and arrow shafts.

While the Native Americans relied on plants for food, early explorers took samples for science. Meriwether Lewis was one of the first to collect plant samples that could be further analyzed once back East. The bitterroot's scientific name, *Lewisia rediviva*, honors the renowned explorer and scientist.

Botanists have many local connections. Glacier National Park was a popular stomping ground for botanists looking for rare species. Robert Statham Williams collected mosses in the Columbia Falls area for at least five months each year from 1892 to 1897. In 1902, he published "A preliminary list of Montana mosses" in the bulletin of the New York Botanical Garden.

All that exploring paid off — Williams had identified more than 300 species.

Potter, a botanist herself, had to learn the desktop publishing software to

complete the book layout — and she's done an admirable job.

The book is full of colorful photos of plants — many by noted photographers — and every chapter has historical photos of the botanists.

There are familiar authors in the book, including former Glacier Park ranger Jerry DeSanto, a botanist in his own right.

Potter will give a talk on the book at the Montana House Saturday, July 8 at 7 p.m. The talk is free, but the public is urged to make seating reservations by calling 888-5393.

The Montana House has its roots in botany exploration, notes owner Monica Jungster. She said her parents met on a field trip hosted by botanist Leo Hitchcock, who is featured in the book, in 1947. From that meeting, the couple crafted the idea of the Montana House and eventually moved here.

(Extracted from Hungry Horse News)