



Pressed for Time: Botanical Collecting as Genteel Pastime or Scientific Pursuit?

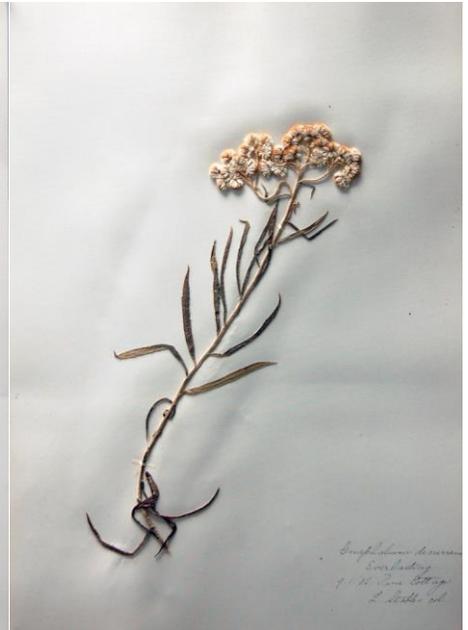
Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut
December 1, 2018 – March 3, 2019



Yellow-Fringed Orchid, Norwalk, 1923. Collected by Wilbur F. Smith of the Norwalk Bird and Nature Club. Bruce Museum Collection.



Resurrection Fern, Royal State Reservation, Fla., 1944. Collected by Paul G. Howes. Bruce Museum Collection.



Everlasting, Pine Cottage, CT, 1886. Collected by Louise Stabler. Bruce Museum Collection.

Greenwich CT, November 13, 2018 – On December 1, a new exhibition opens at the Bruce Museum that will introduce visitors to the hobby and profession of plant collecting around the turn of the nineteenth century. Presented in the Bantle Lecture Gallery, *Pressed for Time: Botanical Collecting as Genteel Pastime or Scientific Pursuit?* will be on view through March 3, 2019.

Starting in the 1820s, botanical collecting became a hugely popular outdoor activity for both amateurs and professionals. Plant collecting was an acceptable activity for women, children, and gentlemen alike. For decades, amateurs and academics respected each other as colleagues, publishing articles in the same journals, exchanging specimens, and considered one another peers.

But by 1900, a divide developed between the two camps that fractured the former collaborative spirit. As botanists moved toward academic and scholarly work, local clubs of amateur enthusiasts carried on the tradition of collecting and pressing plants as a hobby.



Highlighting amateur collectors in Connecticut from 1885 – 1944, this exhibition presents beautiful and fragile historical herbarium specimens. These pressed and dried plants were carefully mounted on paper sheets for both study and pleasure. The process preserved valuable biological information, making these artful arrangements useful for decades after collection.

Examples of specimens from seven different collectors help to illustrate the diverse personalities who collected and preserved the local flora. Some collected for purely scientific reasons; others to enjoy like-minded company and relaxing walks in nature.

One collector, Wilbur F. Smith of Norwalk, CT, was the Fairfield County game warden and also an amateur ornithologist who made a lifetime of avian observations. Mr. Smith presided over the Norwalk Bird and Nature Club from 1921 to 1935, and it was on excursions with this group that he collected his specimens on view.

Louise Merritt Stabler made her collections as a young woman in the 1880s in New York, New Jersey, and at a family home in rural Connecticut. Stabler was a member of the first graduating class of Barnard College in 1893. She married George Howard Parker, a Harvard College zoology professor, and later became active in the women's suffrage movement. The Bruce Museum holds 158 Stabler herbarium sheets, which were first given to a local nature study institution before being transferred to the Museum in 1929.

Today, these striking specimens are often admired for their aesthetics. While framed antique herbarium sheets are now popular home décor, this trend disassociates them from scientific use. Many of these antique pressings are still beneficial to science by providing information such as distribution through time and the effects of climate change, habitat destruction, and invasive species. Historical and modern botanical specimens can also provide genetic material for taxonomic research, allow for investigation of past chemical usage, and aid in teaching plant identifications.

“What we hope visitors will learn from this exhibition is that the era during which these botanical specimens were collected was a moment in time that can never be recreated,” says Timothy Walsh, Collections Manager and the Curator of the exhibition. “Leisure time abounded, distractions were fewer, and people had a closer relationship with the natural world. Fortunately, we have these marvelous records from days past to learn from and to enjoy.”

Pressed for Time draws primarily from the museum's own collections, but also includes specimens generously on loan from the Wilton Garden Club and Greenwich Historical Society. The Bruce Museum is grateful for support of this exhibition from The Charles M. and Deborah G. Royce Exhibition Fund and the Connecticut Office of the Arts.

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Press Release

About the Bruce Museum

The Bruce Museum, 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich, Connecticut, presents more than a dozen changing exhibitions in art, natural science and culture annually. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for students up to 22 years, \$8 for seniors and free for members and children under 5 years. Individual admission is free on Tuesday. Free on-site parking is available and the Museum is accessible to individuals with disabilities. For more information, call 203-869-0376 or visit brucemuseum.org.

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