

HUNTIA

A YEARBOOK OF BOTANICAL AND HORTICULTURAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

VOLUME 1

15 APRIL 1964

THE HUNT BOTANICAL LIBRARY

CARNEGIE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

PITTSBURGH PENNSYLVANIA

HUNTIA

Copyright © 1964, by The Hunt Botanical Library

HUNTIA is a yearbook devoted to studies of the literature on systematic botany and horticulture, botanical voyages and explorations, early agriculture, medical botany, and the related subjects of botanical biography, iconography, and bibliography.

While HUNTIA serves primarily as a record of investigations at The Hunt Botanical Library, its pages are open also to papers from scholars of other institutions.

Editor: George H. M. Lawrence

Director, The Hunt Botanical Library

Subscription price: \$7.50 (US) a volume.

Communications regarding subscriptions, exchanges and contributions should be addressed to the Editor, Hunt Botanical Library, Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213.

The botanical significance of letters and manuscripts

George H. M. Lawrence

ONE SEGMENT OF botanical investigation commonly known as taxonomy, is that relating to the classification and identification of plants. The taxonomist bases his investigations on the pressed and dried plants present in the world's herbaria, on his own field studies of those plants, and on the published and manuscript writings of colleagues and predecessors. Taxonomy is a descriptive facet of botany. Its literature of highest current importance is all of that published from about 1750 onwards. Herbarium specimens prepared from the 17th century onwards serve as today's tangible record of the plants described in that literature. Most of the original descriptions of the plants described as species new to science are based on particular specimens extant in these herbaria. Like so many of the books in which the descriptions are published, some of the most valuable of these herbarium specimens are 150 or more years old.

Both of these sources—the books and the specimens—provide abundant latent data in the form of handwritten notes, annotations, marginalia, and glosses. Associated with them may be field notebooks and even diaries or journals of explorations, replete with information that is as pertinent today as it was when written. For the most part, it rarely occurred to the earlier writers to identify their jottings with even so much as their initials, and seldom with the date. To them, the notation or identification was the important thing. Nonetheless, the value of these addenda for today's scientist does depend in large measure on knowing the identity of the earlier author; and, if he was an eminent authority and monographer of the group of plants in question, his notations are of immeasurable importance. Thus in the identification of the handwriting of the earlier taxonomists, these comprehensive collections of signed autograph letters and the manuscripts of botanists assume an importance to scientists and historians.

To the research botanist and to the science historian, the letters and manuscripts of men of former generations provide a myriad of pieces of information about the man, his investigations, and his colleagues. They are source material of primary importance. Bibliographical studies of pub-

lished botanical works often are based in large degree on evidence in unpublished letters. In these there often are revealed such things as the completion dates of manuscripts of published works and the publication details of those works, especially of those published in separate fascicles or parts. These letters often reveal also the author's sources of information and his explanations of erstwhile conflicting viewpoints. Handwriting of known authorship, *e.g.*, signed holograph letters, has often been the key to the identification of unsigned but critical manuscripts, notes, and fragments by the same person. The importance of letters to biographical considerations is so obvious as to need no explanation.

Curators of leading Continental and British herbaria, and the associated librarians, have long recognized the importance of holographic material as a potential source of significant data. By their foresight they have assembled some superb collections. The curators of like institutions in America, on the contrary, have more often preserved only the correspondence, or selections of it, of former staff members as a record of institutional activity. Few if any American botanical centers have assembled collections of the handwriting of any broad cross section of American botanists, and almost none have done so for European botanists of the 19th century and earlier.

Mrs. Hunt began to assemble such a collection many decades ago, not so much with the thought of its importance to investigators of the future as with the knowledge that from her own reading of such materials she gained an intimate insight into the lives and thoughts of the men who wrote them, information not to be found in any published accounts. Most of the letters she acquired are by authors of books in her library. This collection at the Hunt Botanical Library is small when compared to that at Kew, or those at London's Natural History Museum and the Linnean Society, but it does provide more examples of handwriting of the world's botanists than are known to exist elsewhere in America. One phase of this library's acquisition program is to increase the scope of this collection.

When Mrs. Hunt transferred her autograph letter collection to the Hunt Botanical Library, it contained 410 letters written by 176 botanists. A summary account of it was published in the library's dedicatory volume *The Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt botanical library, its collections, program, & staff* (1961, pp. 25-27). It was a collection strong in the representation of 18th and early 19th century botanists and horticulturists of Britain and the Continent, augmented by fine examples from perhaps a score of the leading American writers in those fields. Since mid-1960, 826 letters have been added to the collection, representing 22 writers already accounted for in Mrs. Hunt's nucleus and 241 who are new to these holdings.

The largest single acquisition is the volume of botanical letters received by the German botanist Carl H. Mertens (1764-1830) during the period 1801-1829. This collection, preserved by him and four successive generations of his descendants, is composed of 263 letters by 156 authors. Notable among them are those by such well-known botanists as Bertoloni, Augustin De Candolle, Chamisso, Desfontaines, Stephen Elliott, Carl Kunth, A. B. Lambert, Conrad Link, C. F. P. von Martius, Henry Muhlenberg, Nees von Esenbeck, Persoon, Poiret, Heinrich Schrader, J. A. Schultes, L. D. von Schweinitz, J. E. Smith, Kurt Sprengel, Steudel, Olof Swartz, C. P. Thunberg, Thouin, Trattinick, Dawson Turner, Wallroth, and Carl Willdenow.

Autograph letters added to the collection earlier include some by correspondents of Ignatius Urban (1848-1931), the Berlin botanist who published on the floras of western South America and the West Indies, and from whose papers a small packet of miscellaneous manuscripts and letters was given recently to this library. Among the 22 letters thus added to the ALS collection are some by Alexander Batalin, Alphonse De Candolle, Alfred Cogniaux, Glaziou (Brazil and Chile), Eduard Martens, G. H. Langsdorff, K. Mennshaussen (St. Petersburg), and Reber (Geneva).

Acquisitions of 1963 include letters by one or more of the following (*new originator to the collection):

*Agnes Arber	*Count Lacépède	*Joseph F. Rock
Sir Joseph Banks	John Lindley	*Berthold Seeman
*J. F. Blumenbach	*E. J. Lowe	Sir Hans Sloane
William Cobbett	*Richard Owen	Sir J. E. Smith
*W. T. Thistleton-Dyer	*Chas. Pickering	*Sir Wm. Wright Smith
*R. K. Greville	Joel Poinsett	*Lazaro Spallazini
Sir J. D. Hooker	*Sir David Prain	Grant Thorburn
William J. Hooker	P.-J. Redouté	Robert Thornton
David Hosack	*Humphrey Repton	Richard Weston

A smaller but choice collection, and one whose contents are of major research value, is that included with the acquisition of the botanical library of Michel Adanson (1727-1806). This is a collection of 116 letters written during the period 1750-1801 by 50 botanists, largely French. The importance in content of these holographs is materially increased by the addition, for most of them, of Adanson's replies, which are in miniscule writing and often intercalated between the lines of the original letter. Notable among their originators are such men as Charles Bonnet, Pierre Buc'hoz, Comte de Buffon, Cosson, Duhamel du Monceau, Albrecht von Haller, both Bernard and Antoine de Jussieu, José Mutis, Noel Joseph de Necker, Johann Schre-

ber, Scopoli, and Pierre Sonnerat. Studies of these letters are a part of the library's current investigations in the life and work of Michel Adanson. For a detailed account of the individual items, see W. D. Margadant, "The Adanson collection of botanical books and manuscripts" in *Adanson*, Part I (1963, pp. 307-339).

In addition to original holographic pieces, the library is acquiring, as required by current or anticipated research, substantial holdings of natural-size xerox copies of original material now at British and Continental centers. During the past year there were added several hundred such reproductions relating to L'Héritier de Brutelle's production of his *Sertum anglicum* (1788). As many or more photo copies of letters by Vaillant and by or to Cavanilles also have been received, as has a microfilm and xerox record of the C. H. Persoon correspondence at Leiden. These xerox copies, produced from microfilm, while not of reproduction quality, admirably serve investigational requirements and are relatively inexpensive.

There is need now, and it is becoming increasingly acute, for a publication that will provide facsimile reproductions—and in some variety for those botanists who once were leaders in their field—of the handwriting of the world's taxonomists. Such a production would be of inestimable value to every working taxonomist who is faced regularly with the problems of deciphering crabbed notes and identifications penciled on herbarium sheets, and the discovering of their authorship. Some day such a volume—or volumes—must be compiled and published. The continued and deliberate accumulation of handwritten letters and manuscripts of botanists from all regions is prerequisite to its preparation. This library will continue to add holographic material as it becomes available, and invites individuals possessing such material to place it here for preservation and future use.