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Editor Robert W. Kiger
Associate Editors John V. Brindle
A. F. Günther Buchheim

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A letter of E. L. Greene to Thomas Howell

Edward P. Thatcher

AN EXTENSIVE COLLECTION of field notes, unpublished manuscripts and correspondence of early resident botanists of the Pacific Northwest was recently transferred from the University of Oregon Herbarium to the Special Collections Division of the Library (Thatcher, 1976). In this collection are the papers of Thomas Howell (1842-1912), one of the earliest resident botanists of the Pacific Northwest. He arrived in Washington County, Oregon in 1849 and began collecting plants around Portland in the early 1870's.

Howell was poorly educated and had no formal training in botany, but he developed an intimate knowledge of plants in the field. A frustration with a dependence on botanists at Harvard for identifying and naming plants led Howell to begin the first flora of the Pacific Northwest region. His difficulties with this privately published work, issued in seven fascicles between March 1897 and August 1903, have been recounted by Lange (1953, 1955). Martin W. Gorman, another active Portland botanist and frequent field companion of Howell's, provided advice on written English and did proofreading for Howell. The financial and editorial assistance given to Howell by E. L. Greene has been documented by Lange (1955).

A letter dated 17 May 1897 from Greene to Howell found recently among the latter's papers at the University of Oregon further reveals the nature of their relationship during the preparation of the flora. It clearly

indicates that Greene was not only a supporter-adviser but also an abusive correspondent. He was very impatient with Howell's ignorance of accepted botanical practice, and berated him for citing a Howell distribution as the original publication of a new name. In Europe at that time it was considered acceptable by some botanists to publish new species on the sole basis of specimen distribution. The present *Code* accepts this as valid publication prior to 1953, if the specimens were accompanied by a printed description or a reference to one (Stafleu *et al.*, 1972).

Greene's reference to 'R. Howellii' in his fourth paragraph is to *Ranunculus occidentalis* var. *howellii*. Since the University of Oregon Herbarium lacks a sheet of this buttercup among Howell's types and the University of California, Berkeley Herbarium (personal communication, 1978) has a sheet with the printed label of 'Thos. Howell' and with annotation, it seems probable that the latter specimen is the holotype; it is certainly an isotype.

Greene's Letter

Washington
17 May 1897

Dear Mr. Howell:

Your note is in, also the new pages. I was wondering if your realizations from sales of your first issue could not enable you to get along for a while, without more help from

me. Honestly, during this summer, I do not see how I can save any money for you. I enclose \$40. but I can not spare it. It will be keeping people whom I owe out of their dues. Part iv of *Flora Franciscana* will soon be done. I have just had to pay down \$100. on that, and there will soon be another \$100. to pay there. Then an issue of *Pittonia* is next week to be paid for. And I am so reduced financially that I can not go even to the Rocky Mountains in vacation for sheer want of money. I can not promise to help you to another dollar, before the end of August, or perhaps even September.

But that may be to your advantage; if you will only get a lot of copy ahead, and have it corrected until it is correct. I did not tell you, when I mentioned the *lavigatus* var. of *Ceanothus* as distinct, that it was published at the very outset as a species. I had not time to write what was needless. You have Watson's Index, and that tells the story. You did not look it up. You would not take time. So you have written *C. laevigatus* as if it were to be your species. This kind of error — born of your to [too] great hurry — will tell against your book more than you think. And errors in proof-reading, as one may charitably call them — such as "*C. pumilis*" for *C. pumilus* are so innumerable, and will so damage the book, that I shall not be surprised if reviewers either ignore your book altogether, or give it such a damning, as I warned you of before you began. They may be expected to say, in recounting even the bad spelling alone, that a great book was presumptuously undertaken by a man who could not spell; any such things, I almost expect to see if they review it at all.

Great pity I did not see either copy or proof of your Leguminous genera. There is no genus "*Petalostemon*" it is long antedated by *Kuhnis-tera*, a name now in use by everyone except the Harvard gawks, whom Asa Gray, who pays them, will not let do as they please. Same of *Oxytropis*, which can not stand in the place of the much older *Spiesia*. What an abbreviation for Hortus you have in your "Hor" (p. 119). Everybody else since the world began has written "Hort."!

You have one *Rhamnus masculine* gender, (Californicus), another feminine gender (*Purshiana*); and these things tell that your grammar ideas — that you have none! No other botanist but you has ever pig-headedly claimed his own herbarium distribution as the publication of species. There never was such a rule admitted by anybody. It is everywhere condemned. Why are you so stubborn? as to write R. Howellii "P.C. Pl. Coll. 1887"? All these things tell against your book!

I have no time to look up your *Prunus villosa* proposition. The genus is *Cerasus* for cherries! And with that genus name you will have no trouble with species names. I am not going to argue further about these matters. Suffice it that Britton's *Illustr. Flora* which will be more influential than all Gray, not only admits *Cerasus* but even *Emplectocladus* that I reduced.

Yours,

E. L. Greene

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 University of Oregon
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