

BOOK REVIEW

RACHEL POTTER & PETER LESICA. 2017. **Montana's Pioneer Botanists: Exploring the Mountains and Prairies.** (ISBN-13: 978-0-692-83690-3, hbk). Montana Native Plant Society, Missoula, Montana, U.S.A. (Orders: www.mtnativeplants.org). \$39.95 US (\$29.95 pbk), 167 pp., color figs., 8" x 10".

Montana's Pioneer Botanists is a delight of a book right from the start. Appealing cover design, lush interior colors, high quality paper, visually pleasing layout. Flipping through the pages just feels good. The text itself is a stroll through the botanical history of Montana, rich in anecdotal treasures. Some familiar yet dusty names—known mainly from papers and specimen labels—come alive, reanimated through journal quotes and historical, collegial, and often trans-continental gossip. Twenty-nine individuals and one group (National Youth Administration, a kind of “junior” Civilian Conservation Corps) are each highlighted in their own chapter by a rotating assemblage of authors. Though different voices and varying chapter lengths (no doubt related to varying levels of available source material) might result in a bumpy narrative for some, together they create a larger tapestry of Montana floristics, from First Peoples to European explorers-for-hire, from university-trained professors to high school biology teachers and self-taught amateurs. It would be such a treat to read similar works from other states, allowing more of us to tap into that sense of place, that innate affinity for our own backyards.

When I began working on a review for this book, I stumbled upon a piece already published by Dr. Pat Holmgren. To my surprise, her words closely matched my initial enthusiasm and praise, right down to her choice of notables and her nod to the importance of herbaria collections. With permission, Holmgren's review from *Kelseyia* Volume 31(1), Fall 2017 (Montana Native Plant Society), is reprinted below. If these reviews move you to purchase, I would suggest you act quickly! The small print run is almost gone, but you can still purchase copies from the Montana Native Plant Society website.—*Brooke Byerley Best, PhD, Botanist & Editor, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.*

“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 (Art) 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.

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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 Leiberger, 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 Lackschweitz).

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 that 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."—*Patricia Holmgren, PhD. 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.*