

New England Botanical Club – Minutes of the 945th Meeting

5 February 1999 Prepared by Dr. Paul Somers, Recording Secretary

The 718th meeting of the New England Botanical Club, being the 945th since its original organization, met on Friday, February 5, 1999, in the main lecture hall at Harvard University's Biological Laboratories with 52 members and guests present.

Vice President Lisa Standley, chairing the meeting, announced the death of long-time Club member and personal friend, Dr. Harlan Banks at the age of 85. Other announcements included: Harold Brotzman explaining that the *American Journal of Botany* could now be read on-line at "www.amjbot.org;" Rick Enser providing copies of the new *Vascular Flora of Rhode Island*; Les Mehrhoff promoting the Club's April 10 symposium on "**The Dynamics of the New England Flora**" and offering copies of a new Executive Order from President Clinton regarding invasive plants; and Lisa Standley offering the Club's *Rhodora centennial* pins for sale and announcing the slate of officers to be voted upon at the next meeting.

The speaker for the evening was Dr. Janet Sullivan, Editor-in-Chief of *Rhodora* and adjunct faculty in botany at the University of New Hampshire, who addressed the topic, "**Reflections on 100 years of *Rhodora***." Janet's talk began with Volume 1, Number 1 of *Rhodora* dated January 1899. The Editor-in-Chief was Benjamin Lincoln Robinson and Associate Editors were Frank Shipley Collins, Merritt Lyndon Fernald, and Hollis Webster. Subscribers each paid a dollar for a dozen issues the first year. The stated purpose of the journal was "to give new stimulus and render material aid to the study of our local flora." Unlike today, the editors announced in the first issue that contributors could follow their own preferences regarding nomenclature and punctuation. All four members of the editorial committee, especially M.L. Fernald, were frequent contributors the first year and for many to follow. The early issues contained mostly short articles and notes, reports and historical accounts of other botanical clubs, such as the Josselyn and the Connecticut Botanical Clubs, upcoming events, and appeals for information on the region's flora.

The idea for the journal, Sullivan explained, arose shortly after the Club's first meeting in February, 1896. The described purpose of the Club and its meetings was to provide for social discourse and the dissemination of information among gentlemen interested in the flora of New England. A specific goal, to create a checklist of the New England flora, helped lead the way to establishment of the journal. In the fall of 1897, the Club reproduced Collins list of algae using a hectograph process, which involved writing on a gel pad which was printed from using aniline dye, somewhat like the later mimeograph process. Members of the Club then began investigating the possibility of a journal. In February, 1898, Robinson's Publication Committee reported that the cost of publishing a monthly journal of about 16 pages each issue would be about \$550 per year and recommended that the cost of plates be supported by "dignified ads," thus making them free to the authors and subscribers. E.L. Rand recommended a minimum of 400 subscriptions would be necessary to support the journal. A circular was distributed to members in April, 1898, requesting that resident members in the Boston area each solicit ten subscriptions and nonresidents each obtain five. This resulted in 450 subscriptions and the journal was launched in earnest. Debate ensued over the name for the new journal. Robinson stated that the name should

be a "distinct and euphonious one-word title." Rand, in botanical jest, suggested the name *Taxus*; other suggestions were *Oakesia* and *Bigelovia*. The name *Rhodora* was suggested but considered "too sentimental" by some, presumably because of Emerson's poem by the same title. In the end, however, there were 15 votes for *Rhodora* and 11 votes for all other names suggested. The name was presented to the Club at the November, 1898, meeting. Subscriptions had increased to around 600 and the Club had launched its journal to reach "the botanical world, who knows us not."

Once the journal was established, Collins' paper on algae and others, such as one by Walter Deane, presenting New England's state by state distribution of taxa in the Ericaceae, began to appear. Costs, however, were higher than originally estimated, due mainly to indexing and electrographic printing costs, and the Club ran a deficit for several years. More ads were included to defray the cost of plates, an item deemed essential to attract and hold subscribers. Ads in the early volumes represented nurseries, booksellers, personal herbaria, and field guides. Following the Club's July, 1900 "excursion" to Mt. Katahdin in Maine and an account of it in volume 3 by Joseph R. Churchill, an ad appeared offering "To Katahdin on horseback." Other ads offered to guide readers to rare plant locations. Controversy over the latter led to ads being dropped in 1907. In 1912, subscription prices were raised to \$1.50 per year. An obstacle to printing Volume 2 arose when a fire destroyed the press where it was to be printed. At the time, however, the page proofs were being circulated to authors and the plates were being stored in a vault, so only a three-week delay occurred.

In the early volumes the editors were also major contributors as authors. In the first volume, for instance, they contributed 28% of the articles. M.L. Fernald alone contributed 15 articles. Even today, he ranks as the most prolific writer in the pages of the journal. In one year he wrote 25 articles and notes, and over a 52-year span (1899 to 1950) he averaged 13 contributions per year. His role as Associate Editor continued until 1928 when he became Editor-in-Chief, a position he held until 1950. "Could it have survived without his energy?" some have asked. Gradually, though, the authorship did diversify. In a thirty-year review article published in 1929, Fernald noted that 399 botanists had contributed to the pages of *Rhodora* thus far.

Reed Rollins succeeded Fernald as Editor-in-Chief. In 1962, when Rollins eventually resigned, Albion Hodgdon from the University of New Hampshire became the first Editor-in-Chief from outside Boston, the journal became a quarterly publication, and a subscription cost \$6.00. Another milestone occurred in 1996 when our speaker, Janet Sullivan, became the tenth, and first female, Editor-in-Chief, particularly notable considering that women were not admitted to the Club until 1968. The journal itself continues to serve botanists of New England but has broadened its readership and geographic scope to an international level, something that actually began as early as 1919 when F.S. Collins published an article on marine algae of China.

Refreshments and socializing by a nearly equal number of male and female members and guests followed the talk.