

## New England Botanical Club – Minutes of the 960<sup>th</sup> Meeting

15 September 2000 Prepared by Don Hudson, Recording Secretary

The 733<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the New England Botanical Club, Inc., being the 960<sup>th</sup> since the original organization, met in Chapin Hall of the Center for Environmental Education at the Chewonki Foundation in Wiscasset, Maine on Friday, 15 September 2000. President Lisa Standley called the meeting to order at 7:35 PM with 33 members and guests present. Lisa asked that everyone introduce himself or herself as the attendance book was passed around the hall. A report of the club's trip to the Gaspé followed with a notable tally: 410 species of vascular plants observed, including 18 orchids and 34 carices on the list. Maine member Joanne Sharpe announced that a symposium on invasive plants is scheduled for Saturday, 30 September 2000 at the Gilsland Farm facilities of the Maine Audubon Society. Paul Somers announced that copies of the Massachusetts Check List of Vascular Plants are still available.

Don Hudson then rose to introduce Connecticut member Les Mehrhoff to introduce the evening's speaker, Les Eastman of Greene, Maine. Les Mehrhoff believes that Les Eastman has introduced more people to field botany in New England than any other individual in the region. Les Eastman was himself introduced to plants by the late University of New Hampshire botanist, Albion Hodgdon. Albion recognized a "diamond in the ruff," and Les's career as a botanist was set in motion. By the early 1970's, Les Eastman had become the Maine State Botanist in every way but by title. He spearheaded the rare and endangered species project in Maine, consulting with both the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Maine State agencies. Les Mehrhoff met Les Eastman during these halcyon years for field botany and plant exploration in New England. Les Eastman dragged Les Mehrhoff off to northern Aroostook County in the summer of 1982 following the Josselyn Botanical Society summer meeting, and the two subsisted on Diet Pepsi, cheese whiz, and the euphoria of discovering plants in their native haunts. Les Mehrhoff chided Les Eastman for his amazing yet irascible personality, and with no further delay invited him to speak to the group on the "*Naturalists of New England*."

Les Eastman has been fascinated by the lives of New England naturalists since his teenage days as a rock-hunter. His researches have brought him to a rich assemblage of personal histories, and he endeavored to share with us a glimpse of these past lives. Any treatment of New England naturalists and natural history includes our mountains. A white man first explored Maine's highest mountain, Katahdin, in 1804, the same year that President Jefferson sent Lewis & Clark on their expedition to find a passage to the Pacific. Charles Turner of Scituate, Massachusetts, returned from Maine with the first descriptions of the alpine vegetation of Katahdin. In the years to follow, the slopes and summits of Mt. Washington and Mt. Katahdin were further explored by the likes of William Peck (*Geum peckii*), Francis Boot (*Prenanthes bootii*), and Edward Tuckerman. Peck was the first person hired to teach natural science at Harvard. Boot was the world's expert on *Carex*, and Tuckerman taught at Amherst.

One of the region's first field naturalists was the Englishman, John Josselyn, who traveled to the provinces of Maine in the 1760's, upon the instructions of Fernando Gorges, who held the crown leases. Josselyn was based in Saco, Maine, and his *New England Rarities* was brought to light more than a hundred years after its writing. Les introduced us to the likes of Eliza Hamlin, who headed the Gardiner Lyceum – the first incarnation of the University of Maine. Thomas Nuttall traveled to Maine to collect tourmalines for Harvard. John J. Audubon hired a young sharpshooter in Dennysville, Maine, on his way to seek out new birds and mammals in the wilds of Labrador. The Lincoln Sparrow was named in the lad's honor.

Les presented images of interest and intrigue. Thoreau, the abolitionist, had a wonderful relationship with God-fearing Louis Agassiz, whose Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard was funded in large part by southern slave owners. Mainer Edward Sylvester Morse left his native state to study with Agassiz and abruptly left his post at the MCZ when it was discovered that he was carrying on correspondence with Charles Darwin. Morse became the Curator of the Peabody Museum of Salem. Les has an abiding interest in tracking down the scattered remnants of the old Portland Society of Natural History. The Society's museum was first built in the 1830's, then rebuilt by the great grandfather of aquatic plant specialist Norman Fassett. The collections of such luminaries as Arthur Stanley Morton, Edward Sylvester Morse, and George Lincoln Goodale

were housed at the Portland Society of Natural History. Les has retraced the web of relationships between the naturalists of these far-gone decades in an effort to better understand their work. George Lincoln Goodale wrote the first Catalogue of Maine Plants in 1868, for example, before arranging to bring the world famous glass flowers to the Peabody Museum at Harvard. Les finished up his presentation with a nostalgic ride down memory lane for Josselyn Botanical Society devotees. Pictures of Merritt Fernald and Kate Furbish riding buckboards in the streets of Fort Kent lent a real sense of historical continuity for all the field botanists in the crowd who have spent time searching for rare plants along the upper St. John River.

Les ended his presentation with a collection of paintings of Mt. Katahdin, beginning with those made by Frederick Church in 1852. Les puts great stock in the masters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whether scientists or artists. He laments the passing of the era of great naturalists, and one is left to imagine that he is quietly urging us to rekindle such broad interest in the diversity and life of our region. The meeting adjourned to questions and refreshments at 8:45 PM.