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# WILDFLOWERS

The Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania • December 2000

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## Holiday Party is December 11th

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Our annual Christmas Party will be Monday, December 11, at 8:00 p.m., at the **Atrium of the A. J. Palumbo Hall** at Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA (Oakland). As you approach the campus on Fifth Avenue (heading toward downtown Pittsburgh), do not turn right into the Carlow Campus entrance. Instead, pass the entrance, stay in the right lane, and make the immediate right into the parking area. Park here and cross the street.

This is the wild Holiday Party! Members and guests bring pies, cookies, candies, fruits, berries, and their wild selves. The most daring and creative will bring in edibles made from something wild. We are hearing rumors of pawpaws, pecans, rabbit stew, and herb tea.

Don't dare stay away if you have nothing to bring, for there will be plenty!

This is Member's Night where we share our great plant sightings over the year. A member can bring up to twelve botanical slides.

We will also draw the winning ticket of our fund-raising raffle. The lucky winner will receive a copy of the *Wild Flowers of Western Pennsylvania and the Upper Ohio Basin* by O.E. Jennings and Andrey Avinoff. And our President will reward the lucky member who sells the most raffle tickets with a wonderful prize.

Do not forget to send in your raffle tickets and your blue pre-order questionnaire! Thanks to all who have returned their booklets.

If it appears that there will be hazardous driving conditions the night of the meeting, please call telephone number (412) 521-9425 after 5 p.m. for a recorded message indicating whether the meeting will be cancelled.

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## Nature by Max Henrici

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*Max Henrici was a noted local nature columnist. This article was published in the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph in 1945.*

For our walk last Sunday Frank A. Hegner and I chose the Raccoon Creek valley in the northern part of Washington County. From Murdocksville we proceeded through Robinson Township in the direction of the historic old Robinson Church. I used to like to visit the churchyard and read the epitaphs on the older tombstones, but the once beautiful countryside there has been turned by the coal strippers into the abomination of desolation, so I now dodge it.

On this walk and also on another short walk I took during the week-end in the woods at Findlay Township I kept my eyes open for interesting things in the plant world.

There were trees of many kinds, of course, and I tried to determine by their form and their bark what species they were. Some, such as the sycamore, the American elm, and the shagbark hickory, were easily recognized, but I was very much mortified by the great number that baffled me. That was true, too, of the plants whose basal leaf rosettes appeared at places where the snow had melted.

However, I decided, as a New Year's resolution, not to fret over my ignorance but to strive

patiently to learn and be contented to learn a little at a time.

I took satisfaction on encountering plants concerning which I had learned something during the year now ended. I found, for example, a number of specimens of the wild yam (*Dioscorea villosa*) to which many of the three-winged capsules were still clinging, and I remembered with pleasure that I had learned that it belongs to the Lily family and differs from another vine of the Lily family, the greenbrier or *Smilax*, in that the stem of the wild yam twines itself around the supporting tree or bush, whereas the greenbrier climbs by putting out tendrils from the petioles of its leaves.

I was pleased, too, at recognizing a number of plants which in their winter form, stripped of leaves and flowers, would have been unknown to me a year ago. One of them was the sweet cicely (*Osmorhiza claytonii*). The sweet cicely plants stood out against the snow in Hildesheim woods. I was interested to notice that they grew in a sort of geometrical progression. A short distance above the ground the stem forked, then each branch of this fork forked again; the branches of the second series also forked; those of the third series divided into three branches, and each of these last terminated in an umbel of five barbed fruits popularly called "Spanish needles" though the botanists apply the name "Spanish needles" to another plant of the *Bidens* genus.

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## Botanical Books, off the Shelf

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When it comes to books, I have a hard time choosing just one. So here is my short list of nature and plant books for the past couple of years.

*Mountains of the Heart: A Natural History of the Appalachians* by Scott Weidensaul. This one twanged my heart strings.

*Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* by William Cronon.

This was my introduction to looking at and being aware of land use history. Fascinating!

*Miracle Under the Oaks* by William K. Stevens. This is a journalist's lively account of a tenacious group of citizens who worked to restore a long lost oak savanna habitat on the fringes of the Chicago urban area.

*The Dying of the Trees* by Charles E. Little. A painful book that made me want to know the woodlands we have more intimately. Also caused me to mourn trees we've already lost and despair for those in danger. Speaks to the power of human impact on the web of things.

*Reading the Forested Landscape: A Natural History of New England* by Tom Wessels. I wish someone would do a book like this for our area.

The book I would like to read in its entirety and have for my own bookshelf is *The Deciduous Forest of Eastern North America* by Lucy Braun. It's out of print.

Kathy McGregor

(Don't give up, Kathy. Chuck Tague said it took him four years to find Lucy Braun's excellent book.)

Three old, old favorites are:

*A Natural History of Trees* by Donald Culross Peattie (1948), a survey of the trees in Eastern North America that is loaded with beautifully written essays.

*Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America* by E. Lucy Braun (1950), an in-depth study of the forests and forest types in the east.

*This Green World* by Rutherford Platt (1942), a collection of essays on plants that reflects Platt's passion and wonder.

I have worn out the pages on my copies of *The Book of Forest and Thicket* (1992) and *The*

*Book of Swamp and Bog* (1995) by John Eastman. These are natural histories of plants that emphasize the interrelationships of plants and other organisms in their communities.

I am also rereading *Hawks Aloft*, (1948) by Maurice Broun, the first curator of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. (I had to add at least one bird book.)

*Chuck Tague*

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## Bus Trip Planned for Royal Botanical Gardens in August 2001

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Member Karen Schmidt is planning a group bus trip to Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton, Ontario on August 25 and 26, 2001. The group will tentatively leave Butler at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday, August 25<sup>th</sup>, and arrive at the Royal Botanical Gardens around 12:00 noon. The group will explore the Royal Botanical Gardens and check out the vendors and demonstrations at an Herb Fair in the park until 5:00 p.m.

The group will stay in downtown Hamilton at a hotel located near a large mall. You will have the evening to enjoy as you wish. The group will leave Sunday morning to stop at the Horticultural School and Butterfly Conservancy, and then spend a few hours at Niagara Falls to explore the gardens, falls or the casino.

Check out the Royal Botanical Gardens website at [www.rbg.ca](http://www.rbg.ca) to learn more about these famous botanical gardens.

The cost is estimated to be around \$135. Please let Karen know if you are interested and she will contact you. The bus will fill up quickly so let her know as soon as possible.

Karen Schmidt, 111 N. Benbrook Road, Butler  
PA 16001  
[kschmidt@spang.com](mailto:kschmidt@spang.com)  
Day: (724) 287-8781 ext. 5170  
Evening: (724) 285-5525

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## Hunt Institute presents "Gifts of Winter"

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The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation will display a collection of artworks depicting the beauty of the season of winter.

The winter season is often described as cold, dark and drab, but even after the hours of daylight shorten and autumn color declines, there is beauty and delicacy in plant forms. View these "Gifts of Winter" in books, watercolors, prints and drawings from the Institute's collection, and in paintings created especially for the exhibition.

Accompanying the exhibition is a full-colored illustrated catalogue that includes a sampling of 19th century poetry related to the season.

The exhibition ends February 28, 2001. The Institute is open from 9 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. It is also open Sundays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. (except December 24 and 31). This Institute is located on the 5th floor of the Hunt Library at Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, in the Oakland section of the city.

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## Field Trip Schedule

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This trip is scheduled for January:

**Sunday, January 21, 1 p.m. – Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation;** Oakland section of Pittsburgh. We will visit the "Gifts of Winter" exhibition described above.

Registration is not required. Everyone is welcome, including non-members. Detailed directions will be provided in January's newsletter.

Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania – December 2000  
5837 Nicholson Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

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## **WILDFLOWERS - Bulletin of the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania**

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Editor: Loree Speedy, 5837 Nicholson Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217 Telephone: (412) 521-9425;  
E-mail: <yoree@sgi.net>.

President: Dr. Mary Joy Haywood (412) 578-6175; Vice-President: Phyllis Monk (412) 831-2724

WILDFLOWERS is published monthly by the Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania. We welcome short articles of botanical interest, drawings, letters to the editor, and notices of botanical events and group activities. Send to the editor at the above address. Deadline for submissions is the 20th of the previous month.

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## **The Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania - Membership Information**

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The object of the Society shall be to bring together those who are interested in Botany and to encourage the study of this science and a knowledge of plants. Our members include both amateurs and professionals. Annual dues are \$10.00 for individual and \$15.00 for family. Students can join at half-rate. To join, mail your name, your address, and check payable to "Botanical Soc. of W PA" to Loree Speedy, 5837 Nicholson Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217. Your membership includes a subscription to the monthly bulletin WILDFLOWERS.

The Society meets the second Monday of each month, September through June, at 8 p.m. sharp, at Trinity Hall or Kresge Theater, Carlow College, 3333 Fifth Avenue, Oakland. All are welcome. An informative program follows the business meeting. Visit the Botanical Society Homepage at <http://home.kiski.net/~speedy/b1.html>.