

Wildflowers

THE BULLETIN OF THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF W. PA.



OCTOBER MEETING - AT A NEW PLACE

On Monday, October 11, at 8:00 P.M. in the English Nationality Room of the Cathedral of Learning (Room 144), Joan Gottlieb will present "Native Species - An Endangered Romance."

Lesquerella, an endangered plant, lives only in a small area in Utah and has never been able to be transplanted successfully. Furbish Lousewort grows only along one section of St. Mary's River in Maine. Why should we be interested in saving our native species? Joan Gottlieb, the Environmental Education Coordinator for the Woodland Hills School District, will use slides of plants and animals to convince us.

Our president, Tim Manka, will present a short introduction - "The Endangered Species--Will You Miss Us When We Are Gone?" using slides he obtained while working as a National Park Ranger for 13 summers. Tim is now teaching Physical Science and Earth and Space Science in Shaler Area Junior High School.



OCTOBER FIELD TRIPS

Oct. 2 - Pawpaw Haven, Aliquippa
Oct. 9 - Chiopyle

For details, see September bulletin.

MAX ARMBRUSTER - MAY HE REST IN PEACE

Author, historian, past-president of the Botanical Society, but most of all friend -- we pay him tribute by re-printing in its entirety his article from TRILLIA XII of 1964...

THE PROBLEM OF A NATIONAL FLOWER

by

Maxim E. Armbruster

After neglecting for 185 years to designate a national flower, resolutions have been sponsored by solons in both houses of Congress empowering the President to proclaim the rose, the violet, or the marigold as the floral emblem of the United States. The women members of that body have agitated for the rose.

America possesses a wonderful indigenous flora; but because official steps have been taken to pre-empt one plant above all others as the national emblem, we must examine this matter seriously and at all costs seek to prevent a mistake from being made. We know from experience that legislators yield on such matters to that group which is most vocal about them.

Several things about the rose are objectionable. The fact that it is the national flower of England comes to mind first; and certainly a nation as great as ours deserves its own national flower. We think of the rose again in connection with the long Wars of the Roses and its consequent association with bloodshed. And we think of it again every June as countless numbers of our people become the usual rose fever victims.

If it is the wild rose the sponsors have in mind for our national flower, we shall have to say that few Americans are familiar with it. The flower the American people know about is the one obtained in florist shops and nurseries, a hybrid plant purely--not created by Nature but by man--which can be reproduced only by artificial means. Is this a fitting characteristic for a plant which is to be the national flower?

Another drawback to the rose is that it has thorns. People are hurt when plucking it, and that is a heavy liability for any plant to bear. Goethe in one of his poems causes the rose to warn the willful youth that it will punish

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Violet - after a water-color by Richard Crist,
Woodstock, N. Y.

him with a wound if he tries to possess it. Lastly, roses are expensive; poor people can not afford them.

What, then, do we want in a national flower? First, we should have a true species, whose seed is sure to come true and produce for us the same kind of descendants. Surely that is not too much to ask of a plant which would be the national flower of the great American people. The national flower should be one that doesn't have to be coddled to grow satisfactorily, just as America was established by sturdy folk who had no time to indulge in coddling. The flower should not be weed-like, a characteristic which, some say, eliminates the daisy from consideration. It should by all means be appealing to children. It should be more or less native to this country, by which is meant that it must have been here long enough to be listed among our native flora.

The flower selected should not be associated with illness or be poisonous. Unfortunately, the goldenrod is often unjustly charged as a hayfever carrier. This lie will eventually be lived down, but how long it will take is uncertain. The flower should, as Dr. O. E. Jennings of Carnegie Institute states, be "sufficiently artistic to be suitable for use on . . . medals, or for architectural ornamentation."

The national flower for this country, in addition to the qualifications already named, should be common enough to be symbolic of a democracy like ours and should be prolific enough to be available to the people without cost. It should be able to grow in every one of the fifty states of the Union. This is important, and a requirement that is hard to fill with the diversity of climate, terrain, and rainfall conditions this nation experiences. Obviously, it is not going to be so simple a thing to recommend a national flower for these United States, and it will take a great deal more than a Congressional resolution with some sentimental words appended to realize it.

There are a few plants that could meet all these requirements. One is Phlox, a genuine American native; but the magenta color of the original *paniculata* species, the one best known, is so hateful to most people, that we must dismiss it from consideration. Penstemon, also a pure American native, has many species and is indigenous even in Alaska; but it is really not well known. Majestic as it is and ideal as its selection might be, it would require a huge propaganda effort to popularize it. The Marigold, native to the Southwest and Mexico, is urged by Mr. David Burpee of the famous Philadelphia seed house. This flower is in some ways desirable. Its drawbacks would be the pungent-smelling foliage (although plants with odorless leaves have been developed), the fact that it is primarily a garden subject rather than a wildflower, and the fact that its reproduction on stone and metal would be difficult because of the involved flower-head. However, the plant is a far wiser choice than the rose and has much to recommend it.

It looks as if the problem now resolves itself to choosing that native plant which will be acceptable to all the fifty states. Only one flower comes to mind for all the qualifications listed in this paper--the Violet. It would not be inappropriate that this flower, rich in tradition, ageless in sentiment, beautiful of structure, charming of fragrance, symbol of modesty--and native to all fifty states--should be the floral emblem of this Republic. The flowers are free to the people, and can be found by meadow, hillside, desert, forest, and stream. Even in far-off Hawaii there are several indigenous species.

The Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania, mindful of these considerations, in 1961 voted in favor of the Violet as the national flower of this country.

However, irrespective of what plant shall receive the greatest agitation in its behalf, our lawmakers in Washington shall sooner or later have to face up to the problem; for there are pressure groups on even such a harmless matter. Serious plant lovers should be alerted to the situation, know that the right selection will add to the saga of America, and that we all should make our small contribution to its solution.