Francis Whittier Pennell biographies of botanists

Coll.221

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Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia

2010.12.07
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Francis Whittier Pennell (1886-1952) was an American botanist and a world authority on the Scrophulariaceae. He served as associate curator of the New York Botanical Garden from 1914 to 1921 and as curator of plants at the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia from 1921 until his death. He had an intense interest in the history of botany and collected biographical material on many early botanists. This collection includes Pennell’s research notes as well as some finished biographies.

Cite as:

[Description and date of item], [Box/folder number], Coll.221, Francis Whittier Pennell biographies of botanists, circa 1924-1952, Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.
Biography/History

Born August 4, 1886 into a Quaker family, Francis Pennell Whittier grew up on a farm outside Philadelphia. Because he was thought to be delicate, he was not expected to work on the farm, and his education took place at the Westtown School. He continued his education at the University of Pennsylvania, earning his B.S. in 1911 and his Ph.D. in 1913. During his doctoral work, Pennell was encouraged by the head of the botany department, John Macfarlane, to pursue the study of Scrophulariaceae. Pennell remained at the University for a year for his post-doctoral fellowship before moving to New York to serve as associate curator of the New York Botanical Garden from 1914 to 1921. In 1921, he moved to Philadelphia to serve as the curator of plants at the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.

Although he was afraid of water, he was ?always a firm believer in the necessity of personal field study, [and] his expeditions took him into Columbia from 1917 to 1918 and 1922; to Peru in 1925 and 1948; to Chile in 1925; [and] to Mexico in 1934, 1935, 1937-1938 and 1940.? (Camp, page 83). He also spent considerable time in the United States, especially in the southeastern mountains or in the west.

Pennell was considered a world authority on Scrophulariaceae and wrote *The Scrophulariaceae of Eastern Temperate North America* in 1935. According to Carol Ann McCormick, he ?also wrote prolifically on plants outside his chosen group, on taxonomic problems, and on botanical history, such as his brief lives of C.S. Rafinesque and Thomas Nuttall.? (McCormick). In fact, he was very much interested in the lives of early American botanists, especially those whose names appeared on the Academy?s herbarium sheets as collectors, and he gathered biographical information on many. Much in demand as a lecturer on this subject, he presented biographical sketches which were often published later.

He was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, The Botanical Society of America, the Torrey Botanical Club, and the Pennsylvania Botanical Society. In 1942, he served as president of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, and for many years he was president of the Philadelphia Botanical Club and editor of its journal, *Bartonia*. Pennell died of a heart attack on February 3, 1952.


Scope and Contents

This collection includes Pennell?s research notes as well as some finished biographies. The material is arranged into two series, ?General biographies,? and ?Biographies of Individuals.? The ?General

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Administrative Information

Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia

2010.12.07

Sponsor

The creation of the electronic guide for this collection was made possible through generous funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, administered through the Council on Library and Information Resources? Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives? Project. Finding aid entered into the Archivists' Toolkit by Garrett Boos.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

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Processing Information note

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Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note
Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia: Francis Whittier Pennell addresses, collection 224; Francis Whittier Pennell correspondence, collection 209; Francis Whittier Pennell field notebooks, collection 208; Francis Whittier Pennell identifications, collection 223; Francis Whittier Pennell itineraries of expeditions, collection 118; Francis Whittier Pennell scientific writings, collection 134; Francis Whittier Pennell Scrophulariaceae studies, collection 672; and Pennell-Pilsbry Expedition to Mexico, collection 903.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

• Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Form/Genre(s)

• Biographies
• Manuscripts
• Research notes

Occupation(s)

• Botany

Personal Name(s)

• Baily, Joshua L., (Joshua Longstreth), 1826-1916
• Barnhart, John Hendley, 1871-1949
• Collinson, Peter, 1694-1768
• Merrill, Elmer Drew, 1876-1956
• Tardieu-Blot, Mme, (Laure)

Subject(s)

• Botanists
## Collection Inventory

### General biographies.

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Biographies of Botanists (general), undated.</td>
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### Individual biographies.

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<tr>
<td>Castle - Greenway, undated.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haenke - Lippincott, undated.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martius - Rau, undated.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scribner - Williams, undated.</td>
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