

Rhodora

JOURNAL OF THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB

Vol. 61

August, 1959

No. 728

THE DISCOVERY AND NAMING OF THE GENUS NYSSA

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Nyssa is a small genus of woody plants, mostly trees, of eastern North America and southeastern Asia. The American *nyssas*, with which this paper is concerned, include *N. sylvatica*, found in forested areas throughout the eastern United States; *N. sylvatica* var. *biflora* and *N. uniflora*,¹ both dominant trees in inundated forests of the Coastal Plain; and *N. ogeche*, a species which is confined almost entirely to eastern Georgia and northern Florida. *N. biflora* is treated by some taxonomists as a separate species from *N. sylvatica*. *Nyssa* wood is of some slight commercial importance in the making of furniture, boxes, and paper pulp, and the nectar from flowers of *Nyssa ogeche* is a source for honey of excellent quality.

The fruits of *Nyssa* species are drupes of various sizes. The stone which each contains bears a distinctive valve which is pushed open by the root end of the growing embryo during germination of the single seed. The presence of this germination valve enables one to recognize a member of the genus in the absence of any plant part save the stony endocarp. Since *Nyssa* endocarps are easily preserved, as well as easily recognized, it is not surprising that this group of plants possesses a well established fossil record.

The occurrence of fossil *Nyssa* endocarps, and often *Nyssa* pollen, in divers Cenozoic strata of western North America, Japan, Siberia, England, and Central Europe leaves no doubt that *Nyssa*

¹ This is the *Nyssa aquatica* of Gray's *Manual*, 8th ed. (See Rickett, 1945)



Eyde, Richard H. 1959. "The discovery and naming of the genus *Nyssa*." *Rhodora* 61, 209–18.

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