

Rhodora

JOURNAL OF

THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB

Vol. 2

June, 1900

No. 18

EDWIN FAXON.

GEORGE G. KENNEDY.

(With portrait.)

THE progress of botanical research in any region is seldom effected by the professional botanist alone. Every herbarium contains sheet after sheet of the rarest and most interesting plants from collectors whose names are associated rather with business or professional careers than with the publication of any botanical work. To such collectors, full of devotion and enthusiasm for their loved avocation, botanists owe a debt of gratitude for valuable assistance freely rendered in the solution of many a perplexing problem, and for the discovery of many an unrecognized and interesting plant. Surely these less-known investigators, often men of high attainments and rare powers of observation, deserve to be borne in remembrance, for their work may well serve as an inspiration and stimulus to faithful and unselfish study. Chief among such students of our New England flora was Edwin Faxon, whose death not long ago brought sincere sorrow to many a heart.

Edwin Faxon, son of Elisha and Hannah (Whiting) Faxon, was born in Abington, Massachusetts, September 16, 1823, and died in Willoughby, Vermont, June 12, 1898. He was of old New England stock, being a descendant in the eighth generation of Thomas Faxon, who came from England to Braintree before 1647. His early boyhood was passed in his native town, where, in the company of a much-loved relative who knew the wild flowers by name, he rambled in lane and meadow, acquiring there the interest in plants which was a source of so much pleasure to him in after years. There also, under private tuition, beginning at the early age of seven years, he laid the foundation of a sound knowledge of Greek and Latin. When a lad of thir-

teen, he removed with his parents to Boston, and entered the school of T. B. Hayward, where he continued his classical studies, and acquired proficiency in French and Italian. German was not much taught in those days, and it was characteristic of him that, later in life, when he found his ignorance of that language disadvantageous, he set to work to learn it, and obtained a good reading knowledge of it after he was fifty years old.

At the age of nineteen, he entered the office of his father, who was established as a leather merchant in Boston. In 1851 and 1852 he made a trip to Europe, spending nearly two years in travelling in the old-fashioned methods, largely on foot, through the Continent and Great Britain. This long journey appears to have satisfied his desire to see the world, for he seldom went out of New England again except on business errands; and in fact often made the statement when urged to visit other parts of the country, "New England is good enough for me."

On his return from Europe, he was admitted as partner in his father's business, and on the death of the latter in 1855, became the head of the firm. Throughout his active and successful business life he found time to indulge his taste for natural history, particularly botany, and his love for books and engravings, of which his knowledge was most thorough and accurate. When he retired from business, at the age of fifty-eight, he was well fitted, therefore, to enjoy the quiet pleasures that such tastes bring. He was never married, but made a quiet and congenial home in Jamaica Plain, happy in the society of younger brothers and sisters who shared his interests and pursuits. Here he brought together an interesting library and herbarium.

He now began to collect plants more seriously, and to explore and study the flora of New England. When Mr. Pringle began his career as a collector, the two were often together, and many were the interesting discoveries they made. With him he thoroughly explored all the ravines on the sides of Mt. Washington, and described their climb out of Tuckerman's Ravine up the wall to Bigelow's Lawn as the only foolish and dangerous adventure he ever had. After Mr. Pringle sought wider and fresher fields, Mr. Faxon still continued his explorations with indefatigable zeal, as many of our younger botanists whom he brought to their first acquaintance with our alpine flora can well attest. It is probable that no one, since Oakes and Tuckerman, has explored the White Mountains so carefully as he.

Mr. Faxon made his first trip to the White Mountains in 1843 by railroad to Portsmouth, N. H., thence on foot with a Boston friend, to Abel Crawford's house in the Notch. A party was made up for the summit of Mt. Washington, and with Tom Crawford as guide, he went over the path he was to know so well in later years. On arriving at the foot of the cone of Mt. Washington, a dense cloud gathered, but the two young men kept on to the top in the fog, while the rest of the party waited at the foot of Mt. Munroe. It gave him great satisfaction in after years to recall the fact that he had been at the summit of the mountain when only a stake in the rocks marked the top.

It was after 1875 that his regular collecting trips to the mountains began. In May or June of each year, he would visit the Crawford House before the hotel season began, and explore the woods and mountains. An account of one day's work will show his enthusiasm as a collector. In the last week of May he started to gather *Potentilla frigida* in flower in its alpine home. Up the steep path of Mt. Clinton, he found no difficulties till near the timber line, but there the soft snow was so deep he could scarcely wade through it. Emerging from the forest, he found the snow either blown off the rocks, or so hard he could walk with more freedom. Following the path to the foot of Mt. Munroe, he encountered a barrier in a precipitous snow slope, icy-frozen, extending from the top of Munroe to the bottom of Oakes' Gulf. Not daring to venture on this toboggan slide of two miles or more, he climbed the rocky summit of Munroe, and down the other side to the little plain by the ice-clad Lakes of the Clouds, and spent several hours exploring Bigelow's Lawn. He then returned by the same route to the Crawford House before nightfall. For many years, he never failed to visit the top of Mt. Washington, and of all the naturalists who collected there, he was the most constant and best known. His philosophical acquiescence in bad weather was the admiration of other less contented spirits, and he often reaped the advantage of this in the brilliant days that follow mountain storms.

With Mr. Pringle, also, he explored Mt. Mansfield, Vt., with its wonderful Smugglers' Notch, and shared with him the pleasure and glory of the interesting discoveries made there.

Mr. Faxon's most important contribution to American botany was the study and collecting of North American *Sphagna*. For several years previous to 1890, he had been much interested in the mosses of New England, and in 1899 sent his large collection of *Sphagna* to

Dr. Warnstorff in Neu-Ruppin, Germany. The value of the material was immediately recognized, and Warnstorff particularly states that his revision of the North American *Sphagna* was due principally to Mr. Faxon's sending him a systematic collection—about five hundred numbered specimens—of the *Sphagna* of Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

In 1890 the Botanical Gazette published Warnstorff's contributions to the knowledge of North American *Sphagna*, translated from the German by Edwin Faxon. In 1893 a prospectus of an intended distribution of sets of North American *Sphagna* was issued by Professor D. C. Eaton and Mr. Faxon. It was estimated that a full series might call for 130 different forms, but the sets as issued in 1896 comprised 172 numbers of very beautiful and carefully selected specimens, making an invaluable collection for the student of North American botany.

I well remember one day in the Alpine Garden of Mt. Washington when we had loaded ourselves with mosses and other plants, chiefly from the ice-cold brooks of that mountain plateau, a dreary fog settled down over the landscape, and we hastened to reach the carriage road before the rainy night set in. After an hour's climb over the rocks, we were in the road, and rested a bit before starting for the summit in the now increasing rain. Mr. Williams and I insisted on sharing Mr. Faxon's load, and were astonished beyond measure at the weight of wet sphagnum he was carrying (these loads were usually from thirty to forty pounds), and at the fact that he had been accustomed to just such burdens for many years in his botanical collecting. And then those pleasant evenings at the Summit House, Mr. Faxon always busy in laying out little bunches of wet sphagnum in his botanical papers, Mr. Williams and I constantly running into his room with a plant or a moss for question or identification, and he citing localities or incidents of his early mountain trips, when he with Mr. Pringle collected for the first time all the mountain rarities.

It is probable that no botanist had a better field knowledge of New England plants in certain areas than Mr. Faxon, in the years from 1872 to 1898. These areas were eastern Massachusetts; Mt. Desert, Maine; the White Mountains, New Hampshire; Smugglers' Notch, Willoughby, and the Lake Champlain shore in Vermont. He was constantly sending specimens from these districts to botanists all over the world, and was always glad to go at a moment's notice to any of these points for a particular plant for any applicant, even if personally un-

known to him. In this respect there was no one like him, and this trait of character won him the admiration and love of a wide circle of correspondents. The amount of his collecting may be known from the fact that after his death his duplicates, given to the Gray Herbarium, amounted to more than eleven thousand specimens of carefully classified plants. Mr. Faxon's first visit to Willoughby, Vermont, was in 1873, and for several summers he devoted himself to collecting the Willoughby flora. In the later years of his life he found much pleasure in the quiet beauty and delightful scenery of that unique mountain pass. It is less rude and rough than Smugglers' Notch, and all the peculiar plants are found within a mile or so of the house, while the birds that summer in the neighborhood comprise many of the rarer New England song birds. It was a treat to go with him on a June evening to the knoll overlooking the lake, and listen to the hermit thrush, while the sunset glow faded on the cliffs, and some stray warbler from the southward announced his summer arrival at Willoughby, to Mr. Faxon's great delight.

It was fitting that he should close his eyes suddenly and peacefully on this beautiful world in such a place, and on such a June evening, and leave to his friends the remembrance of a useful and happy life.

RHADINOCLADIA, A NEW GENUS OF BROWN ALGAE.

R. E. SCHUH.

(Plate 18.)

THE marine flora of our Atlantic coast, from New Jersey north, closely resembles that of the other side of the Atlantic, though probably not half so rich in species; the finding of a new species is therefore more of an event here than there, and when that species constitutes a new genus, it is quite an epoch. Within the past twenty years the only such genera have been *Euglenopsis* and *Phaeosaccion*, and the former of these has been now absorbed in the European *Prasino-cladus*. While it is impossible to say what may not be swallowed up in some terrible "OK" list of the future, the form now to be described can hardly be included in any genus hitherto recognized by ordinarily sane algologists.

Its nearest connection is *Desmotrichum*, especially *D. Balticum*; but in that species the frond is unbranched though with plentiful hairs,



Kennedy, George G. 1900. "EDWIN FAXON." *Rhodora* 2, 107–111.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/14473>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/186913>

Holding Institution

Missouri Botanical Garden, Peter H. Raven Library

Sponsored by

Missouri Botanical Garden

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.