

*Jamaica Plain, Mass., September 28, 1914.*

Dear Dr. Kennedy,

Some time ago Mr. Taxon told me that you had asked him for an explanation of the name *Hydrastis*. At that time I could not give him any clue and particularly the meaning of the words "*Ellisii a nobiliss. virgine americ.*" was very puzzling to me. A few days ago I looked up the matter further and found that Ellis had proposed to Linnaeus to name the plant *Coldenella* after Miss Jane Colden, but Linnaeus apparently changed the name to *Hydrastis* for some reason or other without omitting the reference to ~~Linnaeus~~ Ellis' intention.

In a letter dated April 25, 1758 (see Smith, James Edward. A selection of the correspondence of Linnaeus... I. 95. 1821 ) Ellis says: "This young lady [Jane Colden, see p. 94 & 98] merits your esteem ... her father has a plant called after him *Coldenia*, suppose you should call this *Coldenella* or any other name that might distinguish her ~~cat~~ among your genera". No reference to the plant or the name appears ~~in~~ afterwards in the correspondence between Linnaeus and Ellis.

The name <sup>*Hydrastis*</sup> appears first in Linnaeus *Syst. Nat.* ed. X. 1088 (1759) with "Ellis" after the diagnosis and nothing else. The phrase "*a nobiliss. virgine americ.*" does not appear until 1764 in *Gen. Plant.* ed. VI. 283.

In Gray's *Manual* the meaning of the name is given as doubtful; Britton says: from the Greek, water-acting. I am inclined to believe



that it is derived from ὕδωρ and πολίτης, citizen; Linnaeus apparently thought that the plant lived in the water; in Spec. Pl. 146 he <sup>says</sup> quotes in a note under Hydrophyllum virginianum: "Hydrophyllum verum canadensium in aquis natum diversisissima planta" and later he quotes Hydrophyllum verum as a synonym to Hydrastis. Or possibly the name is derived from ὕδραστis, a plant-name used by Dioscorides.

Hoping that the preceding notes will help you to form an opinion about the etymology of Hydrastis I remain

Yours sincerely

Aspid Rehder.

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Rehder, Alfred. 1914. "Rehder, Alfred 28 Sept 1914." *George Golding Kennedy correspondence*

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