

A Preliminary Report of a Study of the Plants of Winnebago County, Illinois

Evelyn I. Fernald

Rockford College, Rockford, Illinois

Since 1859 plants have been collected in the vicinity of Rockford in Winnebago County. In that period of 76 years there have been quite a few individuals who have made a study of the local plants. One of the earliest of these, and in many ways the most interesting, was Michael S. Bebb (1833-1895). There were so many sheets with his name on them in the Herbarium of Rockford College that the author's curiosity was aroused. As a result of questionings in various quarters, information regarding this unique individual appeared from the most unexpected places. So much material has come to light that a more extensive report on him will be given at a later date. An excellent biographical account of Mr. Bebb was written by Mr. Walter Deane of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in 1896 was published in Volume 21 of the *Botanical Gazette*. In the bibliography given at the end of this article, the following items should be recorded here:

- (1) "List of plants occurring in the northern counties of the State of Illinois, in addition to the catalogue given by Dr. I. A. Lapham." *Trans. Ill. Agric. Soc.* 3: 586-587, 1859.
- (2) "Recently introduced plants in and about Rockford, Ill." *Bot. Gaz.* 1: 68-70, 1882.

In addition to being a well known authority on willows, Mr. Bebb made a careful study of several other groups of plants. Most of his large herbarium, originally of 50,000 sheets, is now in the Herbarium at the Field Museum in Chicago. His plants may also be found in other herbaria in the United States, since he was well known by many of the botanists who were his contemporaries, and exchanged plants with them.

So important are his collections that no list of plants of Rockford and vicinity can be considered complete until the material from his herbarium has been examined carefully and compared with that of the more recent collections. For example, on some of his sheets, he has left the notation that the plant may have been uncommon, or may have been found only recently; while the later collectors may record it as very common. Unfortunately, some of the common and beautiful plants of his day may be at present rare, or even extinct! That other changes may have occurred since those early pioneer days makes this study very engrossing.

The work initiated by Bebb has been carried on at different periods by many others—a few of these are as follows: Miss Mary Norton, Miss Frances T. Sheldon, Miss Agnes Brown, Dr. Ruth Marshall, Miss Lena Henderson, Miss Zaida Fisher (Mrs. Victor Buys), Miss Mabel Thomas (Mrs. Mathew Whelan), and Miss Mildred Willoughby. The plants collected are in the herbarium of Rockford College. The Nature Study Society of Rockford has been actively interested in local plants and has already published these two booklets: *The Trees of Rockford and Vicinity* (July, 1914) and *The Shrubs and Woody Vines of Rockford and Vicinity* (July, 1916). At present this organization, in cooperation with the author of this note, is working on the list of the herbaceous plants of this region, and expects to have it ready for publication in the near future.