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About the Institute

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

5403 - 41st St

Washington D.C.

June 6, 1957

Dear Wilson,

It was something of a shock to receive the announcement of your becoming "emeritus." Time does fly - I was 88 in April and am used to it in my case but it doesn't seem possible for the young people too. You will still have a hand in directing that wonderful school you have established, I hope. Florence Van Eseltine and I joined our homes in September 1953. Glen died the fall of 1938 and Florence was librarian of the public schools of Geneva until 1953, when she had passed 60. Jan-March 1954 we visited Bob, the oldest, in Honolulu. Bill is

professor of bacteriology in Univ. of Georgia, at Athens one of the pre-Revolution colleges. He was married just after he got his Ph. D. Cornell, 1946, and Florence rejoices in his two children, as well as Bob's 4. Dorothy who was three, when Glen died, graduates from Oberlin next Monday - Florence leaves tomorrow for the occasion. Dorothy is to be married in September. All these are my "grandchildren" of course.

I am still working in the Grass Herbarium. I was retired in 1939, but have been "research associate ever since. The visit to Hawaii is the only vacation I have taken. The herbarium has grown enormously with twice as much room as in Dr. Maxon's time. We

have had students working here from China (of the Philippines)

and Chile, and recently one from Brazil.

I hope you have grandchildren, too, they are no end of fun.

Very best wishes to you and Helen and your grandchildren children and

Florence sends best wishes

Affectionately
Aunt Agnes

5403-41st St., N. W.

Mrs. Agnes Chase

Washington 15, D. C.

June 21, 1959

Dear Wilson,

Thank you for your letter of the 16th - I was very much pleased to get it. I suppose you know Zoraida Luces de Febres, who recently gave a beginner's course in ^{grasses} Costa Rica.

She is my prize student and adopted granddaughter - you'd be surprised at the number of my grandchildren, when I had no child of my own - Dr Carlos Munoz of Chile, Dr Jose Vera Santos of the Philippines, Dr Lee Burcham ^{at all} forester of California, Dr Ruth Chow (Chinese) college in Fu Chow, China, besides the Van Eseltine children

(and great-grand²mother to Florence's
grand children) and of course your children,
although I have not seen
them.

That little First Book of Grasses
was published first by Macmillan,
sold out in a few years and Macmil.
did not reprint it - at \$1.25 there was
too little profit. I bought the plates
and gave them to W.A. Silveus of
Texas. That sold out in a few years
and Silveus was dead. It was out
of print for about 4 years some
college teachers suggested to Dr.
Carmichael, Secretary of the Smith-
sonian, that the Institution reprint
it. Dr Carmichael is a new kind
of secretary for the Smithsonian -
he is a psychologist, interested in
people. When he came, 4 or 5
years ago, he went around

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visiting all the workers (a taxidermist told me he "spent an hour with us") and when he came to the herbarium I showed him the handsomest and most amazing ^{grasses} and had the nerve to give him a copy of the First Book (I had bought the remaining copies from the Silvens estate). He came in in a few days to tell me he had read it through so when some professors wrote him suggesting the Smithsonian reprint it (copyright run out some years ago) he agreed. He wanted it done in style - the earlier editions were sold for \$1.25 - had no "style" to them. The Druser frontispiece was his idea - that is he wanted something decorative and I have

this Druser (much ⁺larger) on my wall here. I took it down to the Smithsonian - they unframed it, reduced it in size - and it makes a very attractive book. I added laud-building and some other "reading matter" to it and I'm told it is selling well (at \$3 instead of the original \$25). I was given 50 copies - which I sent out to other grass specialists. Naturally I am very well pleased over it!

Yes, I am still working every day in the Grass Herbarium, past 90, and terribly anxious to get several more things done. I work Saturdays (a guard told 2 grass students working there "Mrs. Chase comes to work every day - and she isn't paid for it - she must be crazy!")

Mrs. Agnes Chase

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The herbarium is enlarged by a floor added above, and by the rooms formerly belonging to the A.A.S. J. R. Swallen is head custodian and there are 4 men and 1 woman botanists - ^{besides} and the "crazy" woman, retired, who works without pay. Dr. McClure is working on bamboos on a fellowship. And there is a man from Field Museum (Chicago Museum of Nat. Hist, I mean) and often botanists from elsewhere (Kostermans of New Guinea just now). ^{These are visiting botanists.} U.S. Nat. Herb. is what it should be now, a center of plant taxonomy, where all botanists are welcome. - Well - such a lot of "shop" I'm talking.

I am glad you are using the experience and knowledge you have acquired during all your years from Fairchild's time.

Mr. Russell is retired, but still putting the seed collection in order.

And Mr. Young, though he looks very frail, is still working part time. I do not see them - or very seldom.

I hope your children are well and happy - how many grand-children have you? Of course you can't equal mine in number. All the Van Eseltine ~~children~~ children and grand-children, and a family of Chase grand-children - bright as they come.

Florence Van Eseltine bought half Casa Contessa ^{fall of} in 1954 - I had just had the house re-done, painted,

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papered, back porch enclosed in
glass windows, gas furnace etc.,
and she has been a lovely, kindly
daughter to me ever since. The
next early spring we went to
Hawaii to visit Bob Van (oldest
son) and his family, wife and 4
children. Bill was married before
that and ^{was} professor of bacteriology,
at Univ. of Georgia, Athens, Ga.
Dorothy Van, youngest child, gradua-
ted from Oberlin in ¹⁹⁵⁷ ~~1959~~, married
the following September, to a class-
mate. They live in Sacramento
and Florence is going out there
in July when their first child is
expected - Bill has a boy 5, and
girl nearly 3. They will be here
for a month after Florence returns.

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from California. She has been mounting plants for Smithsonian Herbarium, and typing ^{grass} index cards for grass herbarium, giving her something of an income besides her pension. She was a librarian of public schools in Geneva, after Glen's death, until she was retired and came down here. This was where ~~she~~ ^{they} came from their honeymoon at Thousand Islands (while I visited my mother in Chicago), so it was not strange to her. - I am most fortunate to have a lovely daughter and so many grandchildren - when at 19 I was a childless widow. - Such a long letter - it is so good to hear from you. Love and best wishes
 Aunt Agnes

Florence sends greetings.

5403 41st St NW Washington 15
Mrs Agnes Chase

Antigua, Guatemala, 22 Oct 1959

Dear Aunt Agnes:

Please pardon my long delay in thanking you for the First Book of Grasses. That book is well on the way to becoming a classic! I wish I had had the sense to buy the plates of my Manual of Tropical and Subtropical Fruits when Macmillan offered them to me for \$800. My reason for not doing so was that I really felt the book was obsolete and should not be kept in print. Your grasses don't get obsolete but the cultural practices of avocados and mangos do. My manual is selling - when a copy shows up - at \$25 to \$35; I think it indicative of the way costs have gone up that your First Book is selling at \$3 instead of the original \$1.25. You can hardly get an important book these days less than \$7.50 to \$10; isn't that right? Incidentally, I have a complete set of Engler and Prantl which I bought from Germany before I left Washington; I paid \$125 for it, and I understand this work is now selling right around \$1000. When we were in Tela, Wilhelm Junk offered the Library of the archeologist Eduard Seler (who had just died) book by book, and one item was the cornerstone of Guatemalan history, Remesal 1619. The price was a thousand gold marks. Dorothy had been talking about a piano. I asked her, which will you have, a piano or Remesal? Of course she took Remesal and I have it here. It is rare because after Remesal got the Nihil Obstat and the book was printed somebody - maybe a succeeding pope - didn't like it and ordered all of copies which could still be found, burned. I don't know how many escaped; perhaps a hundred.

I just wish I could confide that I shall be able to keep on working until I am 80; I don't aspire to 90. But there is so much left to do. And I am beginning to find that the best thing for me is to stick right here at home and work - though I haven't been practicing that since my retirement! But when I go to the international or other horticultural meetings these days I get the feeling that the younger guys are saying "Let's be kind to the old bird; you know, he used to be a good horticulturist!"

Yes, you have done a wonderful job helping young people along the way, and I am sure they all appreciate it; just as Dorothy appreciated what you did for her, and I appreciated what you did for me in the same connection! About the children, beginning with Nancy the eldest, who had another daughter, named Kathryn, a few months ago. Then next comes Hugh, who is now teaching at the Univ of Florida, about to get his PhD (no problem on grades, but he just keeps putting it off because he has so many interesting things to do in the field); not yet married nor any commitment so far as I know; he was 30 about two months ago. Then Marion who is going to have another baby in February; as you know her first is named Dorothy and about two years old. As I am sure I have told you, her husband is a Captain in the Marine Corps and presently stationed in Washington. And little Sal just had her fourth child about ten days ago, named Mary Catherine; her husband hasn't quite got his feet on the ground yet and Sal has been emotionally upset for a long time. She has great courage and common sense and will pull through.

I was greatly interested in the news you gave me of the Herbarium. I shall be seeing Paul Standley in a couple of weeks now - we are driving over to Salvador and Honduras to do a little horticultural looking around and to see Paul and other friends. Paul is holding out well but unfortunately has just worked himself out physically. I believe he is

75 or 76 this year; you know how hard he worked all his active life, and unfortunately he doesn't have your stamina or whatever it may be, so he just spends his time on the veranda reading and occasionally receiving a visiting botanist and giving out information. When I think what a tremendous job he did for Central American (and Mexican) botany it hurts me to know his total income now is \$160 per month and as he says, everything he owns in this world he can put in a suitcase. Because of what he has done for Science, I kept him on at Zamorano up to the time I had to leave; it cost us literally nothing and he was so happy there.

A few years ago, a man came to Zamorano and asked "Do you by any chance have a botanist here?" And I replied, "Well, I am sorry to say we are a bit short handed right now. Of course, over there at that table is Elmer D Merrill, the Dean of American Botanists, and in the Library you will see Paul Standley, author of what I call his five foot bookshelf of Central American floras, and just by chance, Jason Swallen of the National Herbarium is looking into that herbarium cabinet, and there's Louis Williams, one of the outstanding authorities on tropical American orchidaceae, and there's our young graduate Antonio Molina, who takes care of the herbarium and is one of the two or three most promising young Central American botanists." That was an all time high for us!

I was glad to have news of Robert Young and Paul Russell. I am glad the latter is still doing something and Robert Young too. My, how long ago it was that we all worked together under the very inspiring leadership of David Fairchild. If Floyd McClure is still around the herbarium, tell him I hope he will come down here again one of these days. Not enough is being done with the bamboos, and I am afraid the situation is getting even more difficult. "Mick" has done a wonderful - and unfortunately one of these more or less thankless - jobs. If David Fairchild had stayed in active life another 20 years the bamboos would have "gone to town". I still believe in them but I can't do much about it.

I am very glad to have all the news of the Van Eseltine family. Same old story - the kids get married, the grandchildren come along and the first thing you know the grandchildren begin to get married. I would like to get back to Washington again; our last visit was ruined by that storm, which kept us snowbound for four or five days and then we had to go up to New York and fly to Spain - not that I dislike flying to Spain, in fact there is nothing I like better! But I would love to spend a couple of weeks in Washington, say in July or August (unlike everybody else, I always loved the summers in Washn) and if I wait until next year - which I shall certainly do - I will be an Emeritus member of the Cosmos Club but I suppose I shall still have to pay for my lunches which used to be 65 cents and I guess now are about \$1.50.

Much love always, and affectionate regards to
Florence