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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.

TRANSIT OF BOTANY FROM IRELAND TO AMERICA*

J. EWAN

Department of Biology, Tulane University, New Orleans, U.S.A.

"The appeal of history to us all," wrote G. M. Trevelyan, "is in the last analysis poetic. But the poetry of history does not consist of imagination roaming at large, but of imagination pursuing the fact and fastening upon it. . . . the ardor of his own curiosity to know what really happened long ago in that land of mystery which we call the past. . . . [The dead] were once as real as we, and we shall tomorrow be shadows like them. . . . It is fact about the past that is poetic. . . . Let the science and research of the historian find the fact, and let his imagination and art make clear its significance."¹

Botanical historians are fortunate in having the writings of Robert Lloyd Praeger who recorded not only the early history of Irish botany but also his personal reminiscences written after his eightieth year.² Ray Desmond has chronologized the names in his *Dictionary*, published this year,³ but we still must sift the American contacts for those in his list in order that we may trace the westward transit we are plotting today. Richard Pulteney believed that Irish botany was paralyzed from "the distracted state of the country, during a great part of the [17th] century, [and that] had doubtless no small share in retarding the progress of learning and science among the Irish."⁴ But the jurist Sir Edward Coke said "let us now peruse our ancient authors, for out of the old fields must come the new corn."

The earliest and probably the best known in the coterie of botanists born in Ireland who went to America is Hans Sloane, successful physician, antiquarian-collector-extraordinary, patron of the sciences, who in the subsequent founding of the British Museum through his possessions, lives on. Born at Killyleagh, County Down, 16th April 1660, Sloane received his M.D. degree at twenty-five, was elected to the Royal Society the following year and sailed for Jamaica at twenty-seven. From his survey of its flora and fauna, so early in the history of exploration, Jamaica was the first of the West Indian islands to be so well catalogued.

John Ray wrote to Hans Sloane "if you go to Jamaica, I pray you a safe and prosperous voyage. We expect great things from you, no less than the resolving all our doubts about the names we meet with of plants in that part of America."⁵ If the resolution of 'all our doubts' was not to be, the stimulus Sloane gave to American natural history

* This paper was read at the first Irish meeting of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History, held at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin, on 22 October, 1977. Received in September, 1977.

Dear George - what do you think?
Perhaps Truf can help!?
all the best, yours
Hyl

December 3, 1970

Dr. J.T. Baldwin, Jr.
Department of Botany
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia

Dear Dr. Baldwin:

For a long time now I have meant to write to you concerning a matter close to my heart.

As you know, I lived as a boy in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and my father worked here for 13 years. During this time both of us fell in love with the flora and its history. As a matter of fact, my father even started a manuscript on the early collectors, which were a perceptive and courageous group of amateurs, in the truest sense of the word.

During the past 20 years, and far away from this beloved dogwood-and-redbud country, I have reminisced about these Virginia matters with a man, who, for sheer historical insight, botanical erudition and personal humanness has no equal in the contemporary American Botanical Scene. I am talking, of course, about Joseph Ewan, who by now I can count as a friend of many years.

This letter is prompted by my reading his "John Banister and His Natural History of Virginia" which Ewan and his loyal wife, Nesta, have nurtured for some 10 years to publish it finally in 1970. It is a sensitive landmark not only in the botanical history of the New World, but also that of Virginia, a great book by a great man.

Joseph Ewan has published about 5 books and scores of papers, all of highest quality. But to men of independent mind, recognition by their peers sometimes comes painfully and slowly. He studied in Berkeley, yet never received his doctorate, having to leave during the depression for greener pastures. Yet, considering this man's heroic and superb scholarly productions, he deserves the recognition which fate denied to this bright-eyed student in California.

Joseph Ewan has given Virginia a gift - the lives of Banister, and late 17th Century Southeastern culture, including here the magnificent volumes on Bartram and the many papers dealing with Pursh, Clayton, Lyon, and others. I am writing to you in the belief that a Virginia school, in particular the College of William and Mary, should honor itself and its traditions by recognizing Ewan's great contributions, in awarding him a doctors degree, honoris causa.

Please forgive me for writing to you. But just as it would please me no end to see this honor conferred upon my friend, so it would equally please the thousands of readers of Ewan's books throughout this country. It would be a great and gratifying occasion.

With best wishes,

Very sincerely yours,

Hugh H. Ilvis
Professor of Botany
Director of the Herbarium



CHARTERED 1693

COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY
THE HONORS PROGRAM
WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

January 28, 1971

Mr. George B. Van Schaack
The Morton Arboretum
Lisle, Illinois

Dear Mr. Van Schaack,

I wish to thank you and Professor Iltis for the very impressive dossier of letters supporting the nomination of Professor Joseph A. Ewan for an honorary doctor's degree. The testimonial letters, when added to those I had already received, come to the number of 16 in all. Professor Ewan must be a remarkable man, to judge from the letters.

I feel that I ought to explain to you that the procedures here for nominating and securing approval of candidates for an honorary degree are a little complicated and may take a little time. But I shall try to see that your recommendation is acted on as promptly as possible; and I shall certainly notify you when some action is taken.

Sincerely yours,

Carlyle Beyer

Carlyle Beyer
Professor of History and
Chairman, Honorary Degrees
Committee

CB:jgb

Department of Botany
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

Morton Arboretum
Lisle, Illinois 60532

and

December 28, 1970

Professor A. Carlyle Beyer
Chairman, Honorary Degrees Committee
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia 23185

Dear Professor Beyer,

We address you to propose the name of Professor Joseph Ewan of Tulane University for an honorary doctor's degree from the College of William and Mary.

During the past quarter century Professor Ewan has become a most productive and distinguished historian of North American botany, while at the same time building a well-recognized position as a teacher of taxonomy, floristics, and botanical history at Tulane University. Our enclosures, we believe, support this opinion.

We feel our proposal to be appropriately addressed to the College of William and Mary at this time in virtue of Professor Ewan's most recent work, done jointly with Mrs. Ewan, and published last fall by the University of Illinois Press. We refer to John Banister and his natural history of Virginia, 1678-1692. As you are aware John Banister was one of the founding trustees of the College of William and Mary, and, in the Ewans' book, the College now has a thorough and definitive account of his contributions to the early history of Virginia.

We beg to state that we have prepared the papers for this proposal following Dr. J. T. Baldwin's encouraging answer to our letter to him. We hope the proposal may meet with the approval of your Committee.

Sincerely yours,

Sincerely yours,

and

Hugh H. Iltis
Professor of Botany

George B. Van Schaack
Bibliographer