

# The Writings of Eloise Butler



## A Collection of Garden Experiences - c1916

Mistress Mary, so contrary  
How does your garden grow?

Like Mistress, like garden is the reply. In quirks, in whimsies, and in sheer contrariness a wild garden surpasses Mistress Mary. This is true especially of the introduced species. Last summer a robust specimen of *Aster multiflorus* [*Symphotrichum ericoides*] appeared in the marsh, although it had been placed where it ought to be contented when transplanted from the dry prairie. *Gentiana andrewsii* has been naturalized by the brook, and now it comes spontaneously on the dry hillsides. *Viola conspersa* [*Viola labradorica* - American Dog Violet] was found in large masses putting to shame carefully nurtured specimens planted at the opposite end of the swamp. The showy *Liatris pycnostachya* has chosen to appear of itself in the meadow, and the little twayblade, *Liparis Loeselii*, has established itself at a distance from the planted colony.



American Dog Violet (*Viola labradorica*). Photo ©Mark Fieder, Wisconsin Flora.

The royal fern, *Osmunda regalis*, not indigenous to the garden, as was supposed, but laboriously dug and transported from miles sway to the borders of the swamp, has mysteriously sprung up in the center. The most superb growth of *Orchis spectabilis* [*Galearis spectabilis* - Showy



Showy Orchis (*Galearis spectabilis*). Photo ©Jeff Hapeman, Wisconsin Flora.

Orchis] is also unaccounted for, in somewhat dry and infertile soil, where no gardener would ever think of placing it. *Castilleja coccinea* [Scarlet Indian Paintbush], suspected of root parasitism, and accordingly lifted in large blocks of sod, rewarded repeated efforts last season with a single stalk; but at the same time another specimen was found in a seemingly unsuitable place. I have failed in cultivating *Epilobium angustifolium* [Fireweed], although I have planted it both in the spring and in the fall - in season and out of season, from various places in different situations. Two years ago it broke out in two widely separated spots where it had not been consciously introduced.

I have had a similar experience with Indian Pipe, *Monotropa uniflora*, but difficulty with a saprophyte was to be expected. Last summer there was no sign of Indian Pipe, although to my surprise and joy it was abundant for the two previous seasons.

I have thought that I knew every foot of my garden and the position of every sizable plant in it, but I have had so many surprises that I am no longer confident. *Lythrum alatum* [Winged Loosestrife] is a case in point. I wanted to obtain some for the wild garden and looked for it in vain through four



Indian Pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*)  
Photo ©G D Bebeau

seasons. Then I came across a large patch of it in full bloom in the garden! It is not uncommon and I have since found it in existence elsewhere.

The hazelnut, *Corylus americana*, is a superfluity in my garden, but I have been watching with interest the development of some introduced specimens of *C. rostrata* [*C. cornuta* - Beaked Hazelnut]. I felt rather foolish last summer when I discovered a lot of the latter in my bog loaded with the long beaked fruit. It is listed for the northern part of the state and I never dreamed of finding it in Minneapolis. With the exception of the fruit, it differs but little from *americana*.

At about the same time I discovered also the Thimbleberry, *Rubus occidentalis*.

[She lists the scientific name for Black Raspberry, which her text indicates is what she is talking about, but Thimbleberry is a name used today for *R. parviflorus*] This, too, was in fruit and thereby easily distinguished from the more common red raspberry. But how blind I was not to notice before the thick white bloom on the stems.



Winged Loosestrife (*Lythrum alatum*) Photo ©Merle R. Black, Wisconsin Flora.



Mountain or White Camas  
(*Zigadenus elegans*) Photo  
©Aaron Carlson, Wisconsin Flora.

*Teucrium canadense* [Germander] is another new comer. This has followed in the wake of the extermination of Canada Thistle. Shaking my digger at *Zygadene chloranthus* [now *Zigadenus elegans* - Mountain Camas] and *Veratrum viride* and threatening to replace them with something more tractable, brought them to luxuriant blooming, although they had not shown even a switch of a flower bud during five years of zealous care. The *Zygadene* bears an elongated raceme of attractive greenish white shallow bells. The *Veratrum* (false hellebore) is a stout tall plant with large plaited leaves and a many-branched panicle of innumerable small flowers. its hugeness makes it noticeable.

A specimen of *Rubus odoratus*, the beautiful flowering raspberry -- its large rose-colored flowers and maple-like leaves familiar to many under cultivation - was procured from cold Ontario but it died down to the ground every winter and was as effortless as the first Mrs. Dombey [ref to a Dickens character]. Last season it was piqued by jealousy to sprouting into a big bush which blossomed and blossomed, outdoing every plant of that kind I have ever seen. I

merely planted around it a quantity of *Rubus parviflorus*, the salmonberry, saying "I am sure I shall like these as well. They have beautiful white flowers, leaves as fine as yours, *Odoratus*, and better tasting fruit of an unusual color."

I would say to Mrs. Jackson that it is much easier to ask questions than to answer them.

I have planted a good deal of *Erythronium albidum*, but have had but two blossoms, although I have been careful to select two-leaved specimens after the fruit has matured. The leaves come up all right. It seems to require a long time to recover from transplanting. I have seen the flowers in abundance in open meadows and again on limestone bluffs. *E. americana*, on the other hand, blossoms freely in my bog where I have set the *albidum*.

A florist in New York raised *Gentiana crinita* [Fringed Gentian]. He says that the first season's growth from the seed is very tiny. His methods may be learned from consulting Garden Magazine some five years back.



Fringed Gentian (*Gentiana crinita*). Photo Martha Crone  
Sept 24, 1950

**Note:** Since Eloise Butler's time, the scientific names of plants and the classification of plant families has undergone extensive revision. In brackets within the text, have been added when necessary, the revised scientific name for the references she used in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America*, USDA and the *Annotated Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*. Other information in brackets may add clarification to what she is saying.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Wirth Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.

This essay was sent to the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, division D, of the Agassiz Association for publication in the Groups circular bulletin. Eloise was a member of Division D (the middle west) from 1908 until her death. Those bulletins were circulated among members by postal round-robin circulation. The Agassiz Association was founded in the late 1800's to be an association of local chapters that would combine the like interests of individuals and organizations in the study of nature but after 1901 was largely defunct and only the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, with its several divisions, was still active and remained so until 1943.

**Additional notes of Eloise Butler are appended here for lack of any particular document she referenced. The first paragraph appears to have been a writing for the Chapter circular as well.**

At Miss Leavitt's request, I will add an account of one of the many vagaries in wild gardening: Are you all familiar with Prairie Dock, *Silphium terebinthinaceum*, belonging to the same genus as the famous Compass Plant, *S. laciniatum*. It is a native of Minnesota, but is not found near Minneapolis. A single specimen was given me nine years ago and I planted it near my office. Every season it sent up its large green banners, but nary a flower. I hesitated to change the plant to another situation because of its large root and lest I might lose it altogether. So this last spring I gave it a good talking to and bought half a dozen more Prairie Dock and planted them elsewhere. To my astonishment the obstinate specimen sent up at once the tall stalk that burgeoned out into a number of sizable yellow flowers! I have had somewhat similar experiences. Does it mean that plants are sentient beings?



Above: Eloise Butler with Clara Leavitt (right) in front of the Garden office. Photo courtesy Minneapolis Central Library, Minneapolis Collection.

The Boston Herald of July 31 prints an illustrated account of two freak dandelions growing in a yard in Weston, Massachusetts. One is nine feet in height and the other six feet. Both are in the budding stage, so they will attain still greater heights. The nine foot dandelion had a stalk one inch in diameter. Both had leaves eight to ten inches in length.

In clearing out my desk I found a questionnaire that I had once given my pupils in Botany. I will copy two of the replies made to the following questions:

Why did you take the course in Botany? What benefit, if any, have you derived from the study? What part of the subject do you like best?

"I am not a bit sorry I have taken Botany and if I hadn't. I would have been the lesser. Now I observe beautiful nature and feel as if I had accomplished a great deal, although I don't intend to end here. Although I may not study my book as much after this as now, still I will study nature and derive all the knowledge I can from it. Everyone should be made to study Botany." Alpha Sjoblon

"I took the course in Botany, first because I was interested in plants and know my ignorance of nature. I really think people ought to know nature, for, as Shakespeare says, 'The closer we are acquainted with nature, the closer mankind becomes to one another.'"

"I have gained the habit of keeping my eyes open, to notice the different plants and changes in nature. In keeping my eyes open for nature, I have become unconsciously more sharp or bright in my other lessons. I really have found this to be true. I like the part of Botany where we study how closely plants and animals are related in their work for each other." Florence McDonnell.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of first page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. The other photos are ©as credited.