

Morality in the Herbarium



Stephen G. Saupe

Biology Department

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

Collegeville, MN 56321

612-363-2782; 612-363-3202 (fax); ssaupe@csbsju.edu

One of my first jobs as the new Curator of our Herbarium (CSB) was a massive cleaning and organizational campaign. No cabinet, shelf or box escaped my fury. Although it can be dusty and tedious work, I thoroughly enjoyed it because of the element of mystery that's involved. It's like a treasure hunt; you never know what you may discover wrapped in old newspaper.

For example, one cupboard revealed a stack of yellowed newspapers cut into perfect 12 x 17 inch rectangles. The top sheet in the stack was the first page from the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, dated Monday, February 22, 1915 (Fig 2). The headline screamed, "American cotton-laden vessel sunk in North Sea, Reported in Contact with Mine off German Coast." Another article reported that the "Steamer Evelyn [is the] first U.S. ship to go down in belligerent waters." As anyone who has ever worked in an herbarium knows, reading old newspapers is one of the fringe benefits of the job. However, I wasn't quite prepared for the treasures inside.

Removing the top sheet of the stack revealed a neat row of 15 specimens of *Cypripedium candidum* Muhl. ex Willd (Small white lady's-slipper). On a 2¾ x 4 inch (10.3 x 6.8 cm) sheet of lined paper

was handwritten in pencil "White cypripedium/1e juin 1915 Waubun." Subsequent sheets yielded a total of 43 individual specimens of this orchid, presumably all of which were collected in Waubun, Minnesota (Mahnomen County) (Fig 1).



Figure 1. Specimen collected by ZL Chandonnet, June 1915, Waubun (MN)

Further down in the pile were: (1) 22 specimens of *Cypripedium calceolus* L. var. *pubescens* (Willd.) Correll (Small yellow lady's slipper) with a similar handwritten note that read "yellow cypri/1e juin 1915, Waubun;" (2) six additional samples of *C. candidum* with the label, "Lake Grove PO/1e juin 1915 White Cypripedium;" and (3) six *Coeloglossum viride* (L.) Hartm. var. *virescens* (Muhl.) Luer [synonym - *Habenaria viridis* (L.) R. Br. var. *bracteata* (Muhl.) Gray; Long-bracted orchid] labeled "Lake Grove/1e juin 1915."

Although no collector's name accompanied the specimens, these orchids were almost certainly collected by the Rev. Z. L. Chandonnet, a priest who was associated with our institutions from approximately 1880 until 1920. In addition to his style of using separately cut rectangles of newsprint rather than folded sheets to press/store his specimens, the handwriting on the labels, which is partly in French (*i.e.*, 1e juin = first of June), matches that on his herbarium specimens in our

permanent collections.

Chandonnet was a prodigious collector. We have many of his specimens. In fact, CSB purchased from his estate a large collection (about 4000 numbers) that includes specimens from all over the world particularly the Caribbean, Philippines and U.S. Dr. Anita Cholewa, former Director of the University of Minnesota Herbarium, told me that other herbaria, including hers, have collections by Chandonnet. Apparently, Chandonnet prepared sets of plants for sale/exchange and I stumbled upon some of his plants from an unfinished collection.

My initial excitement about this vintage collection from World War I was soon replaced by disgust. Before me was a large group of beautiful orchids, left to disintegrate in a newsprint shroud, much like the carcass of a bison that had been slaughtered for its tongue. The early settlers of the North American prairie saw nothing wrong or wasteful about killing a bison for just its tongue. Since bison were so plentiful, what difference would it make if a few were shot and killed? Today, because there are so few bison such an act would be considered despicable and immoral.

Garrett Hardin (1968), in his classic essay "Tragedy of the Commons", uses this story about the hunting of the bison to illustrate his conclusion that "morality is system sensitive". In other words, an act that may be acceptable at one point in time or under one set of conditions may be unacceptable at another.

Cypripedium candidum is a botanical bison. Years ago, in wet prairie regions of Minnesota these orchids must have seemed as common as a bison or mosquito. Even today, Smith (1993) reports that it is "...possible to stand in a [Minnesota] prairie and see tens of thousands of small white lady's-slippers in a single view." We can only imagine how Chandonnet must have felt scanning the seemingly infinite number of small lady's-slippers in Waubun. Sadly, only a fraction of the original Minnesota prairie remains. As a

consequence of habitat loss, in Minnesota "this species has become quite rare throughout most of its range" and it is an orchid of "special concern" (Smith, 1993).

Eighty years ago, orchids and their habitats were much more plentiful. Making a massive collection of these somewhat exotic plants wouldn't have been considered any more wasteful than leaving a tongue-less bison to rot in the prairie sun. No one, including the Rev. Z. L. Chandonnet, would have thought twice about the morality of such an act.

Obviously, times have changed. Today, plant collectors have well-defined rules for collecting to protect plants and avoid "throwing out the babies with the bath water". Plant systematics textbooks discuss the ethics of plant collecting (*i.e.*, Walters and Keil, 1996) and various groups have developed guidelines for responsible plant collections. For example, the Plant Conservation Roundtable (1986) suggests that, among other things, when collecting multiple specimens, make sure there is a clear need for the number of specimens you wish to collect. Chandonnet certainly violated this maxim.

Fortunately, the captain and 23 crew members of the *Evelyn* were rescued. And, I rescued a few orchids.

References:

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The Minneapolis Morning Tribune

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MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1915. WEATHER—Minnesota, snow or rain; PRICE ONE CENT in Minneapolis colder today; tomorrow fair.

AMERICAN COTTON-LADEN VESSEL SUNK IN NORTH SEA, REPORTED IN CONTACT WITH MINE OFF GERMAN COAST

STEAMER EVELYN FIRST U. S. SHIP TO GO DOWN IN BELLIGERENT WATERS

Washington Instructs Ambassador Gerard to Conduct Exhaustive Inquiry Into Disaster. Nationality of Mine Not Yet Established—Captain and Crew of 27 Rescued.

GERMAN SUBMARINE SENDS BRITISH SHIP TO BOTTOM

Downshire Held Up in Irish Sea Not Far From Liverpool—Crew Landed After Being Given Five Minutes to Quit the Ship—Under-water Craft Believed to Have Been Famed U-12.

Washington, Feb. 22.—The United States Government was officially advised last night of the destruction of the first American vessel on this side of the Atlantic by a German submarine. The American ship, the Evelyn, was captured by the U-12, a German submarine, on the coast of Ireland. The ship was carrying a cargo of cotton bound for Bremen had been blown up at Borkkum, just off the coast of Germany but that the crew had been saved. The cause—submarine or mine—was not given in the dispatch.

Conference at White House. After a conference with President Wilson, Secretary Bryan established Ambassador Page at London, and Ambassador Gerard at Berlin to make an exhaustive inquiry as to the facts, and if the crew was landed at either of their respective jurisdictions to furnish them with the necessary papers. Captain Smith and the crew, so that they might return home safely.

Sea Zones Never Defined. Although the extent of the sea zones of war proclaimed by Germany was not known, it is believed that the danger areas of submarines, although the waters of that vicinity are

YESTERDAY'S LOSSES IN MARINE WARFARE

VESSELS SUNK.

EXTRA

Fire in East St. Louis Rages Over 4 Blocks

Damage at 2 o'clock This Morning Estimated at \$1,000,000.

East St. Louis, Ill., Feb. 22.—Fire which at 1 o'clock this morning was under control, in the district and block, at an early hour, it was impossible to estimate the probable damage, it seemed certain that property valued at several hundred thousand dollars had its origin in the Ziegenbohl Fur- niture Company's Building at Collins street. The fire was discovered after 11 o'clock and spread to the buildings at the other three corners of the intersection.

Threats Seemed Doomed. At the work of the fire, however, it was almost completely destroyed and the tower building, the Majestic dome. The blaze was not discovered until after the closing of the day, reported to the police, however, it invaded the fire zone and hampered the work of the firemen. Reported. Up to 2 o'clock the fire had spread over an area covering the block at St. Louis and Collinsville Avenue, damage at that hour at approximately \$1,000,000.

Hostile Aeroplane Within Fifty Miles of London

PUTTING A GUN INTO ACTION IN CAMP ESTABLISHED BY KITCHENER IN FRANCE FOR HIS NEW ARMY



Despite the silence imposed by the censor, news has come out that Lord Kitchener's new army is moving into France to take part in a general offensive movement by the Allies in the spring. Despite the presence of German submarines in the English channel the troops and their equipment are going across the water by thousands every day. The British army, not a rifle has been lost. One of the British divisions at the front has been ordered to move forward. Travelers who have seen the troops say their six months of training in England has made them a fine, hardy lot. This picture which just arrived in this country shows some soldiers pulling a gun into position.

WAR OF 11 NATIONS TOLD IN PARAGRAPHS

The American steamer Evelyn, cotton-laden for Bremen, has been blown up by a mine near Borkkum Island in the North Sea. The British steamer Downshire has been ordered to fall in with the Evelyn.

Some of the official reports of the fighting on land show that the British are making progress near the East Prussian frontier, where the Russians claim to have been victorious. The Russians have been more active in the Baltic, where they have been fighting for nearly two months, and in the Baltic where they

Turk Declares Entente Forced War Upon Nation

Prince Said Halim Accuses Allies of Bad Faith in Ottoman Dealings. Grand Vizier Says That Country's Integrity Is Assured.

Details Rapid Strides Made by People in Working Out Destiny.

Proud of Military Showing Made in Wake of the Balkan War.

"Progress Manifest Everywhere in Material and Intellectual Way."

By Associated Press. Constantinople, Feb. 22.—Prince Said Halim, the Grand Vizier of Turkey, in the first interview he has ever given, has outlined to The Associated Press Turkey's reason for entering the war. He explained the abolition of the capitulations and pointed out the advances made during the past six years.

Entente's Offer Rejected. "We have rejected the Triple Entente's offer to guarantee Turkey's integrity for thirty years," said the Grand Vizier. "because acceptance would have been deli-

Three Are Killed in Battle Between Whites and Indian

Attempt of Posse, Under United States Marshal, Meets Stubborn Encounter With Pinte Band in Utah—Attempt to Arrest Outlaw Chief Is Fiercely Resisted.

Two Reds and One of Officers' Force Meet Death in Struggle, and Six of Band Taken Prisoner—Will Fight Until Death. Is Indians' Ultimatum.

Grayson, Utah, Feb. 22.—(Special.)—Jan returned to the posse with the message from the Indians. "We will fight until death." While the posse was receiving this information, another band of two or three white men lost his life, and two were wounded.

Figure 2. Newspaper used by ZL Chandonnet to press orchid specimens.