

World of Wood

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Collections and recollections — 50 years of IWCS



*Have a blast,
IWCS, and give
it all you've got
for another 50!*

The cover photograph, which shows an elephant seal carved by Joan Radcliffe and accompanied by the above tidings, was selected "Best of Show" in the 50th Anniversary Color Photography Contest. Page 2.

ALSO INSIDE:

More colorful and historic photographs, plus tales from 50 years of wood collecting and other information on wood and the people who love wood in all its beauty and variety.

Collecting wood collections: The University of Florida

by Frederick R. Davis

Why collect wood? In setting out to write the history of the University of Florida Wood Collection, this fundamental question seems like a good point of departure. While there are many reasons to collect wood, most fit within three categories: aesthetic, utilitarian and scientific.

Collectors who keep wood for aesthetic reasons seek beautiful woods. It is the color and figure of various woods that fascinate the aesthetic wood collector. Of course, utilitarian wood collectors also have an interest in color and figure but, to those characteristics, they add physical properties and working qualities. Is the wood strong enough? Is it light or dark enough? Is it fine enough?

Utilitarian and aesthetic wood collectors differ in how they seek to use the wood. Aesthetic collectors may be satisfied by the appearance of a particular species while the utilitarian has in mind the use of a wood. Scientific collectors, especially wood technologists and comparative anatomists, share some interests of the other kinds of collectors.

Yet, scientists study wood anatomy or the form and microscopic structure of different species. Of the three groups, scientists are most preoccupied with precise identifications and the use of wood to provide information of a taxonomic nature. At the University of Florida, the collection unites wood collected for all three reasons.

Several collections have become part of the University of Florida Wood Collection. They include the Milton F. Scott Collection, George Conrad Bucher Collection, Smithsonian Collection (with the collection of Boris Alexander Krukoff), specimens from Project 1 at Syracuse University, and the Madison, Wisconsin, Wood Project.

The resulting collection represents approximately 15,000 specimens from all over the world, with a particularly strong representation of tropical species.

With more than 7,000 specimens, the Milton F. Scott Collection represents the centerpiece. For that reason, and Scott's excellence as collector and his relationship with the founders of the International Wood Collectors Society, this account will emphasize Scott and his collection.

I have also included brief considerations of other collectors and their contributions to the University of Florida Wood Collection. In addition, I explore other elements of collecting, such as the relation-

ship between amateurs and scientists.

Milton F. Scott Wood Collection

By all contemporary accounts, Milton F. Scott excelled in his wood collecting efforts. He began his collection in 1935 while he was attending summer school at the University of Florida. Within two years, Scott managed to amass many specimens for his collection and for trading with other wood collectors.

One experienced collector, E.J. Lee, noted his respect for Scott's trading list in a letter dated October 31, 1937: "Was quite impressed with the list of species, so many of them will yield beautiful and nice(ly) textured wood for the lathe. I am sure you have done a lot of hard work in cutting and seasoning them."

Besides assembling a large trading stock, Scott quickly developed a reputation for his seasoning skill, as noted by Lee on March 13, 1938: "You surely have done very well in obtaining a seasoned condition on most of the species, in fact the condition is better than I thought possible with some of the dense woods."

Harold Nogle (IWCS treasurer 1948-1954, president 1967-69) echoed Lee's comment in a letter of August 10, 1941: "How do you manage to get such nice fat pieces dried, like you sent me??? If a fellow cannot get a perfect piece from what you send, it is his own fault."

Many other collectors expressed their respect for Scott's seasoning skills. Scott's occupation certainly contributed to his skill in handling wood. He worked as a shop teacher in Miami, Florida — first, junior high and, later, high school. Yet, vocation fails to explain how Scott gathered a large trading stock in two years.

Scott capitalized on several unique features of his situation. First, of the 800 or so trees found in the United States, approximately 400 can be found in Florida and most of those appear in south Florida, a short distance from Miami. Thus, Scott's early collecting efforts gave him many of the species that other collectors lacked.

The second factor that contributed to Scott's trading collection involved good fortune in addition to hard work. As he was first developing his collection in 1935, Scott contacted Professor Walter Mardin Buswell at the University of Miami, who happened to have a collection of 1,500 unfinished yet seasoned wood samples. Scott, the shop teacher, offered to prepare

proper specimens out of the rough logs.

Finally, Scott lived near the U.S. Plant Introduction Garden at Chapman Field where many exotic species underwent examination for viability in the USA. With a large collection of woods for trade, Scott could begin writing other collectors. He soon created an extensive network of wood collectors who were drawn to wood for reasons of beauty, utility and science.

Many of the collectors in Scott's network were hobbyists who, like him, were interested in the beauty and utility of wood. Some shared teaching shop as a profession but, when it came to collecting wood, they were adamant amateurs.

Nonetheless, the wood collectors were amateurs with well-developed standards of protocol. For example, they obtained specimens strictly by collecting samples in the field or through trading. Wood collectors rarely bought specimens from one another except as a last resort, and they defended trading over purchasing.

Wilbur Opdyke (first president of IWCS) refused any kind of payment from Scott in a letter dated December 29, 1944: "Don't YOU ever suggest paying me for specimens or postage on anything that I have that you want. Like you, I keep no record of anything I send to the old guard and don't give a darn just so long as I am not in the red more than I can help."

The other acceptable method of acquisition was to visit an area and cut down trees for samples. Certain individuals in Scott's network considered this a required aspect of a collector's apprenticeship.

Leo Kische revealed this belief in a letter to Scott: "I'm afraid the Capt. (Adcock) won't succeed as a collector, until he learns to help himself. Both of us roamed the woods, and have cut many species. Perhaps if the Capt. begins a study of trees he will find out (what) he can get."

Besides standards of collection methods, Scott's peers had high standards of quality. Aesthetic and utilitarian wood collectors placed considerable value on the quality of a specimen. Heartwood was the most valuable portion of timber and, to some collectors like Orville Oaks (IWCS editor 1947, secretary 1948), it was the only acceptable part of the tree.

In an early letter, Oaks noted his preference to Scott: "As stated at the beginning of our contact concerning woods, I am anxious to get all my samples from the heart of the tree as all woods — or nearly

Wood Collection, notes on its development and history

all — have light colored sapwood. It is only the heart that is beautiful, and small trees seldom have heartwood that is of any color" (October 21, 1937).

It appears that Scott took this comment to heart, as it were, since very little sapwood appears in his collection of 7,000 specimens. After heartwood, size was of critical importance to collectors and they transmitted the dimensions of the pieces in their collections along with lists of specimens for exchange.

Were specimens large enough to cut to the appropriate size? When pieces were too small to fit the exacting specifications of Scott's collection, he would painstakingly attach the small specimen to an appropriately sized piece of plywood.

Seasoning, as previously noted, was of great importance to collectors. The bowing and cupping that accompanied improper seasoning could ruin a collection so collectors discussed methods of drying, including

soaking the wood in water or salt water.

Clearly, there was more to Scott's network of wood collectors than the label "amateurs" would suggest. This informal group of amateurs maintained high standards of participation.

Returning to the reason triad (aesthetics, utility and science), the collectors emphasized beauty and utility. Given this emphasis, what was their relationship to the scientists (the third group of collectors and the keepers of the largest collections)?

Scientists stood to benefit from certain standards set by the amateurs, especially seasoning. Wood technologists had some interest in nice pieces of heartwood (insofar as heartwood represents the commercially valuable wood used for furniture and cabinetry, and its usable characteristics).

Yet, to a wood anatomist who assesses the form and microscopic structure of wood, sapwood is the same as heartwood. Size hardly matters to the anatomist when much of his work can be completed by using microscope slides.

Scientists did adopt the protocol regarding trading rather than buying new specimens although they were, on the whole, far more willing to pay for acceptable specimens, providing that their own standards were met.

Scientific standards of collecting placed considerable emphasis on accurate identification. For the sake of verification, scientists required herbarium vouchers, which included leaves, flowers and fruits from the same tree as the wood specimen.

Scott encountered this requirement early in his collecting hobby when he sent his list of trading woods to Harry Philip Brown at the Syracuse School of Forestry. In his reply dated September 29, 1937, Brown stressed

verification: "Am I to understand that you collected herbarium material from these trees before they were felled? I must make certain that the material which you plan to supply is absolutely authentic. If you can forward a set of herbarium material (one mount for each sample) with the woods you plan to supply it will be fine."

Although Scott incorporated scientific names into his lists early, he never collected herbarium vouchers. Instead, he relied on Buswell for accurate identifications, which was all the verification required by the network of wood collectors.

Not all wood technologists required vouchers, however. Ellwood S. Harrar (author of *A Guide to Southern Trees* and a professor and dean at Duke University's School of Forestry) was impressed by the quality of Scott's specimens and he encouraged Scott to contact Yale and Syracuse:

"I have had occasion to examine the wood samples rather carefully and am sure that if you should care to do so you would find ready markets of this sort in both Yale University and the New York State College of Forestry. I am inclined to believe, however, that you are a little too reasonable in selling material of such high order for so small amounts" (April 28, 1938).

In keeping with the amateur protocol, Scott sold woods only as a last resort and he would set the price at 10 or 12 cents plus postage, a nominal fee at best.

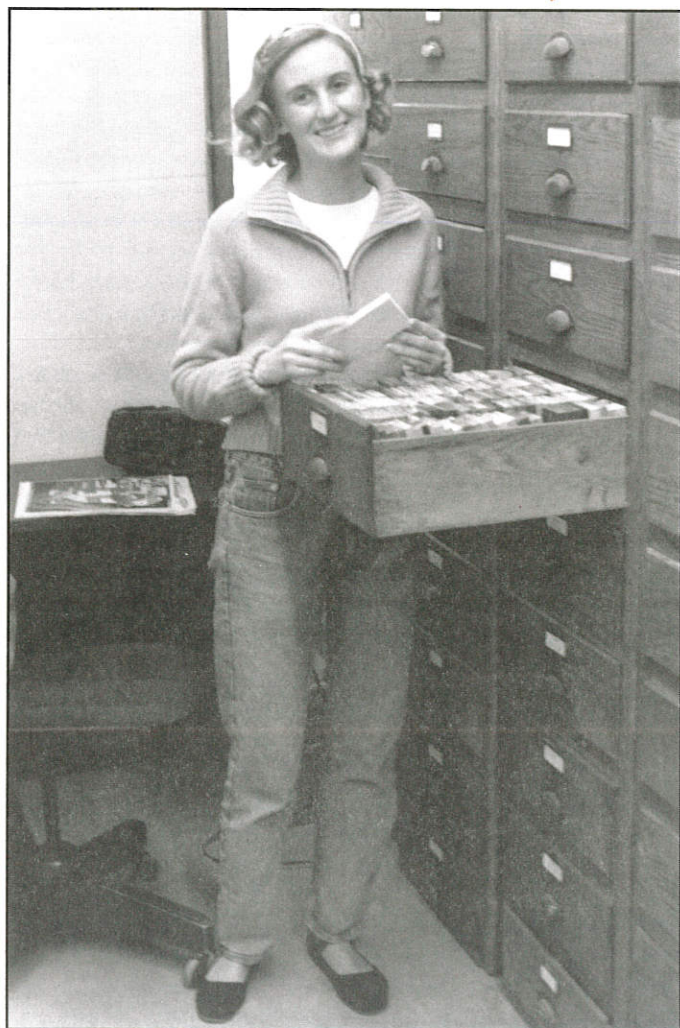
Scott also corresponded and traded woods with Samuel J. Record at the Yale School of Forestry in Connecticut. As curator of a large collection of woods, author of several major books on trees, and editor of the journal *Tropical Woods*, Record was one of the most influential figures in the world of wood collecting.

Despite his stature in the scientific field, Record advised and traded with many amateur collectors. Such efforts enabled him to build the Yale collection while instilling interest in the scientific aspects of wood collecting.

In a letter of February 10, 1939, Record explained to Scott that, although Yale did not have a duplicate list, he was still interested in exchanging: "However, if you care to send on your specimens I will make a selection of foreign woods which I believe would be interesting to you."

During their correspondence, Record also encouraged Scott to obtain the full series of *Tropical Woods* and his book,

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Meri Holtzmeier, a University of Florida graduate student in botany working with Dr. William L. Stern (IWCS #311-H), studies a wood sample from the Milton F. Scott Collection. Photo by W.L. Stern.

Development of University of Florida Wood Collection

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timbered the New World.

Both Record and Harrar recognized that working with amateur wood collectors could be mutually beneficial. Other scientists preferred to distinguish themselves from amateurs by refusing to participate in their activities.

John R. Millar of the Chicago Field Museum and Natural History stressed to Scott the museum's interest in science over utility in a letter dated March 21, 1950:

"The museum as a matter of policy does not desire to display handmade pieces such as you have turned, because of the danger of shifting the emphasis in our exhibition of woods from taxonomy and geographic distribution to industrial use, of which there would be no end."

A scientist from the University of Idaho was more adamant in his refusal to cooperate or collaborate with amateurs:

"We have not been particularly interested in collecting wood specimens purely as a hobby or simply from a collector's viewpoint. Therefore, we would not be interested in entering into an extensive exchange with you. However, we do have some extra pieces of native Idaho woods on hand and I should be pleased to send you some of these in exchange for some of the more interesting and important tropical hardwoods of Florida" (E.C. Jahn to Scott, December 18, 1937).

This statement suggests several presumptions and fallacies, foremost among them is the implication that a collector's viewpoint is in some way less rigorous or simple. It was also a mistake to presume that Scott would have any interest in trading rare, tropical hardwoods of south Florida for the more generally accessible woods of Idaho.

Finally, how would a simple collector know which of the woods are more interesting and important? Scott noted, "Did not answer," on the front of the letter.

To some degree, amateur wood collectors formed the IWCS hoping to achieve legitimacy that would be recognized by the community of scientists. Harold Nogle addressed this idea explicitly in a letter to Scott dated January 25, 1945:

"Quite a furor was started here a few months ago back about organizing a wood collectors' association, rules, constitution, dues, charges between members and others, etc., etc. I think it would be a good thing, as it was pointed out an association

might have more weight with colleges and other contacts than an individual, and it might work out to the advantage of the college, etc., in obtaining herbarium material, etc., as well as to advantages of the members . . ."

So far, we have examined how Scott developed his collection by cutting and preparing his own samples, trading for specimens with fellow amateur wood collectors, and exchanging woods with scientists with varying degrees of success.

Once Scott had managed to collect most North American species, he began to consider methods of obtaining international specimens. Besides international lumber companies and forestry schools, Scott wrote to consulates in foreign countries. Occasionally, he received several dozen specimens simply as an expression of good will. Other countries forwarded his offer to wood collectors or wood technologists.

Still, Scott's collecting skills transcended the mere amalgamation of the collection methods discussed thus far. Other wood collectors, like Harold Nogle, had expressed their awe and envy at Scott's success:

"You spoke of getting 4 or 5 hundred samples thru the mails in the last 3 or 4 months. HOW DO YOU DO IT??? I do good to get 4 or 5 thru the mails, much less hundreds. Who do you write to get all that wood and how much does it cost? Maybe you have secret connections, and if so, O.K." (May 22, 1947).

By 1950 or so, Scott's collection had surpassed 6,000 specimens. In the 20 years before he donated the collection to the University of Florida, Scott added another 1,000 samples.

A combination of hard work, a large trading stock of uncommon species, and persistent correspondence provided the collection that serves as the backbone of the University of Florida Wood Collection.

Other wood collections

The remaining 8,000 specimens represent the collections of George Conrad Bucher, Boris Alexander Krukoff (Smithsonian Institution), Project 1 at Syracuse University, and William Louis Stern (Yale University, University of Maryland and Smithsonian Institution).

While these wood collections are smaller than Scott's and the details of their genesis are sparser, the brief accounts below will address many of the same issues

as Scott's wood collection.

George Conrad Bucher Collection

The George Conrad Bucher Collection contains nearly 2,000 specimens. The individual specimens in the collection are clearly the work of a collector other than Milton Scott. Many pieces are cut from small limbs, and bark remains on half of each piece.

In contrast to many of the collectors listed above, Bucher did not restrict his collection to heartwood. Like Milton Scott, however, Bucher lived in a region where he could obtain some the rarest and most sought after woods: Cuba.

As a cabinet maker, Bucher's interest in wood tended toward the utilitarian and aesthetic, but he traded with major scientific wood collectors and respected their standards. In fact, he corresponded and traded with Samuel J. Record at Yale University for several years during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In a letter dated March 18, 1929, Bucher acknowledged the necessity of herbarium vouchers:

"I was able to get (Professor Emanuel Fritz) up a pretty fair collection of Cuban woods, principally the well-known varieties, all of which I felt pretty safe in labeling with the scientific names. However, the only way to be absolutely sure is to take a blossom and the specimen from the same tree."

Bucher went to great lengths to obtain verification of his identifications. In one case, he collected a sample from a tree that was sterile so he was unable to get a flower. When he encountered the species again, the tree was not in bloom so Bucher called on another collector, named Brother Clemente, who finally collected a flower which could be accurately identified by yet another individual, Dr. Juan T. Roig y Mesa.

Record fully recognized the amount of effort behind such a hard-won identification as he acknowledged in a letter dated November 23, 1931:

"Your letter of November 17 is received and I am very much pleased with the result of your further efforts to determine your No. 177. This demonstrates anew the advantage a resident has over an itinerant collector and also emphasizes the valuable service you are rendering to botanical science."

"Furthermore, a wood specimen incor-

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uncovers early correspondence on wood collecting, IWCS

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rectly determined has now become the only representative we have of the genus *Torralbasia*, an important asset in the systematic work on wood anatomy . . . If collectors fully realized the importance of wood anatomy, they would include wood samples, especially when the trees and shrubs are not in flower or fruit."

Earlier in the correspondence between the two men, Bucher sent Record a report of an expedition Bucher had taken to Pico Turquino, a mountain in Cuba. It was Record's belief that this was an important contribution, so he sent the report to the editor of the *Journal of the New York Botanical Garden* who published it under the title, "Narrative of an Ascent of Pico Turquino, Cuba."

More than anything, Bucher's collecting success suggests the ability of an amateur wood collector to make valuable contributions to science. The Bucher Collection is the most recent addition to the University of Florida Wood Collection.

Boris Alexander Krukoff Collection

Boris Alexander Krukoff was a Russian-American botanist and entomologist who began collecting for the Intercontinental Rubber Company in 1928 after graduating from the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse.

As a freelance collector, Krukoff collected for the New York Botanical Garden and I.R.C. throughout South America (including several expeditions on the Amazon) and Africa. He collected wood and

herbarium vouchers early in his career.

The stated purpose of one expedition in 1930 was: "to collect vouchered wood samples in connection with a court case over the use of the trade name 'mahogany.'" Krukoff financed several expeditions through the sale of plant specimens.

Eventually, he accepted a position as an economic botanist and entomologist with Merck Pharmaceutical Company. Many of Krukoff's wood specimens reached the Smithsonian Institution and they were eventually acquired for the University of Florida Collection by William Louis Stern.

Project 1 Wood Collection

The 700 woods in the Project 1 Collection rival the Scott Collection for adherence to exact specifications. Each specimen measures one inch by three inches by four inches. Like the woods of the Scott Collection, the samples have been painstakingly cut and sanded.

From its beginning in 1935 at the New York State College of Forestry, Project 1 sought to make sets of authentic wood samples available to forestry schools, forest experiment stations and other interested agencies throughout the USA. Herbarium vouchers supported the identifications of each Project 1 specimen.

The founders of Project 1 believed there was a need for wood collections for three reasons:

- a. to serve as known check samples;
- b. to permit further studies of our commercial woods, especially the woods of our secondary species; and

c. to provide authentic wood samples for display purposes, etc.

The Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of Florida was one of 25 original cooperating agencies in Project 1.

Conclusion

With the Milton F. Scott Collection, George Conrad Bucher Collection, Boris Alexander Krukoff Collection, specimens from Project 1, and additional miscellaneous specimens, the University of Florida Wood Collection represents the range of styles and interests of wood collectors.

There has been much discussion recently about the destruction of forests worldwide, with particular emphasis on the old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest and the rain forests of tropical regions.

It follows that if forests are disappearing, so are trees. Thus, wood becomes more difficult to obtain. Of course, the commercial value of many woods is known and planting programs offset forest destruction to some extent. But what of woods that have value yet to be assessed?

With forests disappearing at unprecedented rates, it is entirely possible that valuable woods are disappearing. Collections play an important role in preserving what is being lost while assisting in the ongoing process of analyzing what remains.

In the last several decades, three major collections (Yale, Duke and Chicago Field Museum) have been consolidated at the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory, Madison, Wisconsin, raising the count of that collection to more than 100,000 woods.

While there is a certain convenience to centralized wood collections, independent collections like the one at the University of Florida play a role in maintaining accessibility. Both Milton Scott and George Conrad Bucher were keen to donate their collections to a place that would make them accessible to students, amateurs and professionals. Access was one of the primary objectives of Project 1.

Thus, the ongoing contribution of the University of Florida Wood Collection lies with its many species, excellent preparation, and accessibility.

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