UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA HERBARIUM (FLAS)

History of the Herbarium

UF Herbarium (FLAS)

The Florida Agricultural Experiment Station was established in March 1888 as a division of the College of Agriculture at Lake City.

Interestingly the well-known collector, A. H. Curtiss, was employed as botanist. Within six months of the establishment of the station political turmoil concerning the first director, J. Kost, M.D., resulted in his resignation along with all of his appointed staff. Although we have numerous A. H. Curtiss collections I can find no evidence to indicate that these were deposited during his tenure as a staff member.

The University of Florida Herbarium (FLAS) evidently began in 1891 as the Herbarium of the Florida Agricultural College in Lake City. Peter Henry Rolfs made voluminous contributions to the collection during the period 1891-1898 and he may be considered the founder. The original collections bear labels printed with “Herbarium of Florida Agricultural College,” as their heading. Correspondence with Rolfs during this period indicates that the herbarium carried on an active exchange with several mid-western institutions. The 1898-99 catalogue of the College indicates that the herbarium consisted of 5000 sheets, comprising 1400 species, and 150 lichens (esp. those of W. W. Calkins).

Peter Henry Rolfs came to Lake City from Iowa in late (Nov.-Dec.) 1891 as horticulturist and biologist for the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station and professor of natural science, entomology, and botany for the Florida Agricultural College. His college title was changed to professor of biology and horticulture in 1894.

The herbarium was moved by covered wagon to Gainesville in 1906. In this year the Florida Agricultural College and the Agricultural Experiment Station were consolidated with the Kingsbury Academy of Ocala to form the University of Florida. H. W. Fawcett joined the staff in 1905 and developed a considerable cryptogamic collection. In 1907 the cryptogamic collection was greatly increased by the addition of 2500 specimens from the Fungi Columbiani set.

For many years the herbarium suffered the vicissitudes incident to a constantly changing personnel, lack of specific funds and competition with projected experiments. By 1925 the collection had crept to 6000 sheets of higher plants and 5000 packets of fungi.

With the addition of Erdman West to the staff in 1925 and Miss Lillian Arnold in the early 1930s the herbarium began renewed activity and expansion. It grew steadily throughout the 1930s, ’40s and ’50s under their guidance. They cooperated in countless research projects and offered plant identification as a service in the Florida Cooperative Extension Service. In 1935 the collection contained about 19,000 sheets of higher plants and 14,300 collections of fungi and by 1960 it had swollen to 138,880 specimens.

Noteworthy additions during this period include the A. A. Cuthbert Herbarium of approximately 5000 specimens, the plant holdings of the Florida State Museum (4711 specimens, including the Herbarium of S. C. Hood), several thousand more S. C. Hood collections, 15770 specimens of lichens, liverworts and mosses collected by Severin Rapp, wood blocks and vouchers of American wood and economic trees from the New York State School of Forestry, George E. Ritchey specimens from the U. S. Plant Introduction Garden, Edward and Robert P. St. John Florida ferns, innumerable West and Arnold collections and

those received through inter-institutional exchange. The herbarium also benefited from the prominent studies of H. Harold Hume (Zephyranthes, Ilex, and Camellia) and William A. Murrill (Crataegus and fungi).

Daniel B. Ward continued the course of his predecessors as curator of vascular plants in the 1960s and 1970s. Dana Griffin, III and James W. Kimbrough also joined him as curators of the bryophytes and lichens, and fungi respectively. Through their efforts the collection was nearly doubled to almost 250,000 specimens by 1980.

FLAS was administratively incorporated into the Department of Natural Sciences of the Florida Museum of Natural History in 1981. Concurrent with this transfer, Norris H. Williams became Keeper of the Herbarium.

In 1989 Angus K. Gholson, Jr. donated his entire herbarium (15000 specimens), library and related equipment and supplies. This is an excellent collection especially rich in its representation of the flora of the Florida Panhandle. It is the most noteworthy single contribution made in our recent history.

The University of Florida Herbarium is a collection with an excellent representation of the vascular flora of Florida and the southeastern United States coastal plain, including abundant material from the 19th century. The bryophyte and lichen collections encompass Florida and tropical areas, especially Costa Rica, Venezuela and Brazil. The Fungal Herbarium is comprised of Florida fungi, especially agarics and polypores, and the wood collection is worldwide with a tropical emphasis. The recent addition of a preeminent paleobotany collection to the Florida Museum of Natural History brings the total museum botanical collection holdings to around one-half of a million specimens.

Written by: Kent Perkins
Last content revision: 25 Jan. 1995

Transfer of the Herbarium from IFAS to the Museum – Important Documents

1972 Documents between Dr. John W. Sites, Dean for Research, IFAS, and Dr. J.C. Dickinson, Jr., Director of the Florida State Museum

Overview and Proposal – prepared by Dr. Sites.

Letter from J.C. Dickinson to J.W. Sites in response to the proposal.

1978-1981 Documents including Final Agreement

Letter from Dr. Graig Shaak to Dr. J.C. Dickinson – discussion of the transfer and the issues involved. 28 Aug 1978.

Herbarium Committee Report to Vice President Dr. Robert A. Bryan. 18 Jan 1979.

Letter from Dr. Robert A. Bryan to Dr. Kenneth Tefertiller, Vice President of Agricultural Affairs. 14 Feb 1979.

Letter of IFAS commitment from Dr. F. Aloysius Wood, IFAS Dean for Research, to F. Wayne King, Director of the Florida State Museum. 16 Mar 1981.

Letter regarding commitments from Dr. Robert A. Bryan to Dr. Charles A. Woods, Chairman, Department of Natural Sciences, Florida State Museum. 16 Mar 1981.

Final Transfer Agreement . 23 Mar 1981.

Ward Arbitration

Ward Arbitration 1 – results of the 1st meeting. 19 Sep 1983.

Ward Arbitration 2 – results of the 2nd meeting. 25 June 1984.

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