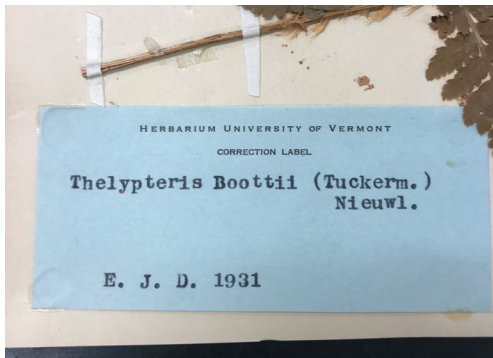


Report from the Herbarium:
What's in a Name?
Hopefully more than just initials...



By Carol Ann McCormick, Curator, UNC Herbarium

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Herbarium (NCU) is a world-wide collection of botanical specimens. We curate algae from the Antarctic, ferns from Finland, trees from Tyrrell County, mushrooms from Mauritania, wildflowers from Wyoming, and lichens from Los Angeles. A label is associated with each specimen, and ideally this label contains information about who collected the plant, the date it was collected, and the location the plant was found.



Annotation label by "E.J.D." on a specimen currently filed under *Dryopteris x boottii* in the UNC Herbarium.

Sometimes, much to herbarium curators' consternation, a collector may take shortcuts with label information. A place may be abbreviated: "Cola" for "Columbia, South Carolina," "BRP" for "Blue Ridge Parkway," or "CH" for Chapel Hill. The date may be shortened to 3/4/06, leaving it open to interpretation if the collection occurred on March 4th or April 3rd of 1806, 1906, or 2006.

One of the most frustrating label shortcuts is when a collector abbreviates her name, assuming that everyone knows who "F.B.H." or "W.C.C." is. While it certainly makes my job of cataloging specimens easier if each collector puts his/her full name on the label, I also consider a label to be Your Moment to Shine – let the world (or at least me!) know who you are! Also, consider

that in 100 years, you may be, alas, sufficiently obscure so that we no longer recognize you by just your initials.

In January 2019 we started work on our latest cataloging effort, funded by the National Science Foundation, in our fern collection. I am making database records while undergraduate Said Alhassan makes digital images of each specimen. You can find the fruits (or shall I say "spores") of our labor at pteridportal.org.

As I was cataloging our woodferns (*Dryopteris*) I found a specimen not only collected by "F. B. H." in 1902 but then annotated by "E. J. D." in 1931. The only clue besides the dates was that both the collector's label and the annotation label had "Herbarium University of Vermont" printed at the top. I took photos of the whole specimen and each label and sent an email to Dr. David Barrington, curator of the Pringle Herbarium at the University of Vermont (VT). He quickly replied, "I don't know who FBH is but EJD is E. J. Dole."¹

Eleazer Johnson Dole (1888-1954) was a professor at the University of Vermont for most of his professional career. In 1938-1939 Dole taught Section B (Women) of Elementary Botany, while Miss Stone taught Section A (Women), and Professor Gershoy and Mr. Dodd taught Sections C and D (Men). That same academic year Dole also presided over Plant Morphology and Advanced Systematic Botany; the labs for those classes appear to have been co-educational.³ In 1937 Dole was the editor of the 3rd edition of *The Flora of Vermont*.⁴ Perhaps in preparation for this book he



UNC undergraduate Said Alhassan makes digital images of Herbarium fern specimens.

was reviewing the fern specimens in the University of Vermont Herbarium and noted the name change from “*Aspidium boottii*” to “*Thelypteris boottii*”. How this specimen, now filed under “*Dryopteris x boottii*,” came to reside in the Herbarium in Chapel Hill is not known.

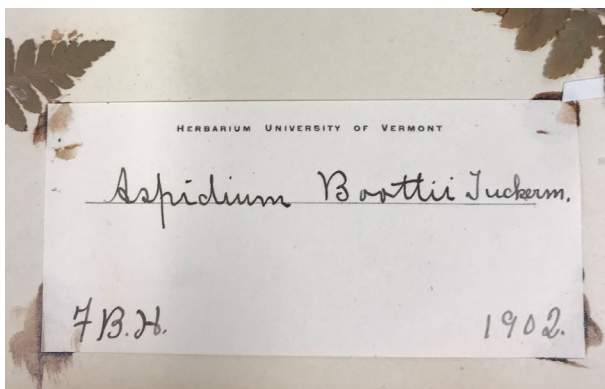
Figuring out the full name of “FBH” took calling in another sleuth. I recalled that Dr. Peter White, former director of the North Carolina Botanical Garden, loves old botany books. He is originally from New England and has an excellent selection of floras, checklists, and publications from that region. I sent the photos of the specimen and labels to Peter and within minutes he and I were in his Coker Hall office, pulling books from the shelves and scanning them for any mention of a collector with the initials “FBH.” Within half an hour, we had to admit temporary defeat. Peter, however, was determined to not concede, and continued searching online. By the end of the afternoon he found a reference to “Mrs. Frances B. Horton” in a summary of the 6th Annual Winter Meeting of the Vermont Botanical Club.

“... Much interest was manifest in the account of the finding of a plumose variety of *Asplenium ebeneum* Ait. By Mrs. Frances B. Horton of Brattleboro [Vermont]...”⁵

Peter found further evidence of Ms. Horton’s interest in ferns in a short note in the Vermont Botanical Club Bulletin:

“Mrs. Frances B. Horton, 13 Brook Street, Brattleboro, Vt., would like to secure living plants for cultivation of the harts-tongue fern, *Scolopendrium vulgare* Smith, and *Aspidium fragrans* Sw.”⁶

Peter really hit pay-dirt with a newspaper article devoted to Mrs. Horton’s living fern collection.



Label by F.B.H. on a specimen currently filed under *Dryopteris x boottii* in the UNC Herbarium.

pressed ferns and an equal number of pressed specimens of mosses and lichens, all scientifically labeled and classified.”⁷

A search of the Consortium of Northeastern Herbaria (<http://portal.neherbaria.org/portal/>) revealed only four other fern specimens collected by Frances Horton and deposited in herbaria, two at the Gray Herbarium of



The fern specimen collected by F.B.H., currently filed under *Dryopteris x boottii* in the UNC Herbarium.

“Mrs. Frances B. Horton, whose home is on Brook st. Brattleboro, Vt., has a most valuable and interesting collection of ferns, representing all the different varieties found in southern Vermont and a few that are exceedingly rare and never found in this section of New England. The ferns are attractively arranged on the terraces near the Horton home, many growing from chinks in the terrace wall, and all presenting a beautiful exhibition of plant life. They represent between 1000 and 1500 different plants, and no less than 80 species and varieties.”⁷

More interesting for our purposes was the last paragraph of the article:

“Mrs. Horton also has a **herbarium** with 100 kinds of

Harvard University and two at the University of Vermont. One of the specimens curated by the Gray Herbarium is particularly interesting as it was not only collected by Frances Horton, it is named in her honor as well – *Asplenium ebeneum* var. *hortoniae* Davenport, later called *Asplenium platyneuron* forma *hortoniae* (Davenport) L. B. Smith.*

“This remarkable and most beautiful variety of the Ebony Spleenwort was found growing on limestone cliffs in company with typical *Asplenium ebeneum* [sic; *Asplenium platyneuron*] and *A. trichomanes* by Mrs. Frances B. Horton, at Brattleboro, Vermont, in September, 1900. It presents an appearance so striking that at first I was inclined to regard it as a new species... Mrs. Horton is to be congratulated on so interesting a discovery, and it is to be hoped that she may be rewarded still further another season by finding fertile fronds.”⁹ Mr. Davenport was to be disappointed – by 1976 only sterile plants of *Asplenium platyneuron* f. *hortoniae* had been found.¹⁰

With the help of UNC-Chapel Hill Library’s subscription to Ancestry.com I was able to find out a bit more about Ms. Horton. Frances Belle Davis was born in Newfane, Vermont to Alexander H. Davis and Sylvia T. Davis, both natives of Newfane.¹¹ She was a school teacher, was married to William C. Horton, and together they had a daughter, Lula B. Horton Smith.¹² Frances died in 1907 of “cancer of the whole pelvis” at the young age of 51.¹¹

I am glad that Peter White had the persistence and resources and time and interest to decipher “FBH” to Frances Belle Horton. I hope to inspire any collectors reading this article to include complete information on any plant specimen labels they deposit in an herbarium – the curator thanks you for it!

*Orthographic variants include “hortonae” and “hortoniae.”

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