

AMERICAN
WILDFLOWERS

National Geographic
Illustrations by
Mary E. Eaton

Presented by
The Hunt Institute for
Botanical Documentation

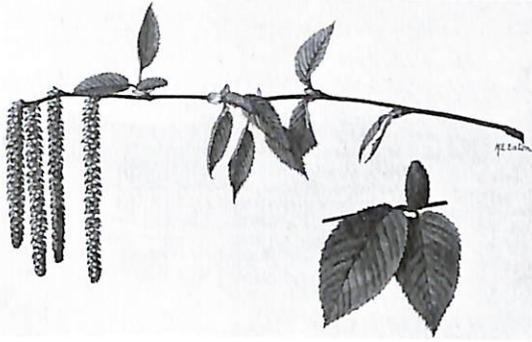
CARNEGIE-MELLON UNIVERSITY
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

AND

The National Geographic Society

WASHINGTON, D.C.

1 NOVEMBER 1976 - 25 MARCH 1977



This exhibition of watercolor paintings of American wildflowers by Mary E. Eaton, staged with the generous cooperation of The National Geographic Society, offers selections from a notable collection of botanical illustrations. The Society's holding of 670 studies of American flora is one of many rarely exhibited rich accumulations of natural history studies stored in the archives of institutions throughout the world. An ambitious program of publication in *National Geographic Magazine* was launched in 1915, and by 1925 some 245 subjects had been reproduced, full-page, and in color, in 7 issues of the magazine, and in *The Book of Wild Flowers* (1924); descriptive notes accompanied each subject – altogether an admirable (and expensive) undertaking. But an artist's talent can be fairly appraised only on the basis of his or her original artwork. The present exhibition of Mary Eaton's work offers a rare opportunity to study the originals of a richly gifted artist-illustrator.

Like most of the lady illustrators of the nineteenth century, her career was passed in relative obscurity. Mary E. Eaton (1873-1961), daughter of an English curate, received a thorough grounding in draughtsmanship and in watercolor technique in English art schools. Though she acquired a qualifying certificate, it is not known that she did any teaching. After a few years as a designer at the Royal Porcelain Works at Worcester, she came to New York around 1911 and was an illustrator at the New York Botanical Garden until 1932. She carried out several illustration commissions and produced a considerable body of work independently. Having retained her British nationality, Miss Eaton returned to England in 1947. Apart from records of several awards at Royal Horticultural Society shows, her story fades from view.

If we can recount little of this modest artist's life (only a single photograph of her could be found), her life's work speaks emphatically for itself, as demonstrated in the present exhibition. These studies are obviously competent as botanical illustration in that the requirements of scientific accuracy are respected and the plant subjects projected as living organisms by the art and craft of a sympathetic temperament. Beyond this we recognize a quality of elegance, in the sense of the word as applied to a mathematical demonstration to describe its economy of means, its reduction to absolute essentials. The term plant portraiture could be justly applied to these works of Mary Eaton.

Acknowledgements

The National Geographic Society made its entire collection of Mary Eaton watercolors available for selection of the material for the exhibition, and furnished enlarged prints of National Geographic copyrighted photographic illustrations from its files. We are particularly indebted to Mr. Howard Paine, Art Director, Mr. Andrew Poggenpohl, Art Editor and Mrs. Merrill Clift, Assistant Art Editor.

Mrs. Marjorie G. Hodgson, a niece of Mary Eaton, has compiled biographical data and made it available. Mrs. Diane Schwartz, Head Reference Librarian at the New York Botanical Garden, also furnished biographical information.

Chronology

Born 27 November 1873 at Coleford, Gloucestershire; eldest daughter of the Reverend Thomas Kerby Eaton. Attended private schools, Hampstead and London. About 1892-1893 – attended Taunton (now Somerset) College of Art, North Newton, Somerset: Art Class Teaching Certificate, and Art Master's Certificate.

ca.1899 – lived in London, attended Royal College of Art, and Chelsea Polytechnic.

1900-1901 – membership in Zoological Society, London.

ca.1901-1909 – employed by Royal Porcelain works at Worcester.

1909 and 1911 – visited brother, Clifford Eaton, a banana planter, in Jamaica.

ca.1911 – moved to New York

June 1911-January 1932 – staff artist at New York Botanical Garden.

May 1915 – first illustrations published in *National Geographic Magazine*.

14 November 1922 – awarded Royal Horticultural Society's Silver Gilt Grenfell Medal, for her exhibition of paintings of American wild plants.

17 May 1932 – *New York Times* article about her exhibition of approximately 100 watercolors at the New York Botanical Garden Spring Inspection.

30 April 1946 – letter from Lord Halifax, British Ambassador in Washington, praising her war services.

1947 – returned to England.

31 January 1950 – awarded Royal Horticultural Society's Gold Grenfell Medal.

25 May 1953 – certificate of membership in National Geographic Society.

16 November 1955 – British Museum (Natural History) acknowledged her gift of drawings of American plant subjects.

4 August 1961 – died at Cossington, Somerset; buried at North Newton, Somerset.

Known Publications

1901 – *The Ark and Nonsense Lines for Animal Lovers*, George Allan, London.

May 1915 – *National Geographic Magazine* published first of seven articles illustrated by Mary E. Eaton: "American Wild Flowers," 29 illustrations.

1916-1941 [-1964] – major contributions (color illustrations) to *Addisonia*, published by New York Botanical Garden.

June 1916 – *National Geographic Magazine*: "Common American Wild Flowers," 17 illustrations.

June 1917 – *National Geographic Magazine*: "State Flowers," 30 illustrations.

1918 – ink illustrations published in John Kunkel Small's *Ferns of Tropical Florida*, New York, and *Ferns of Royal Palm Hammock*, New York. (Many of the first book's illustrations reproduced in John K. Smith's *Ferns of Florida*, New York, 1931.)

February 1919 – *National Geographic Magazine*: "American Berries," 29 illus.

July 1922 – *National Geographic Magazine*: "Midsummer Wild Flowers," 38 illus.

1919-1923 – *The Cactaceae, descriptions and illustrations of plants of the cactus family*, by N.L. Britton and J.N. Rose, Washington.

June 1924 – *National Geographic Magazine*: 47 illustrations.

1924 – National Geographic Society: *The Book of Wild Flowers*, 241 illus.

July 1925 – *National Geographic Magazine*: "Pages from the Floral Life of America," 55 illustrations.

1928 – illustrations appeared in William Stugis Thomas', *Field Book of Common Gilled Mushrooms . . .* New York.

1932-1940 – Otto Degener's *Flora Hawaiiensis, or The New Illustrated Flora of the Hawaiian Islands*, Honolulu.

Additional Illustration Projects Before 1947

Three flower plates in black-and-white for the Comstock Publishing Company.

Color prints of "North American Butterflies," "Game Birds of North America," and "Injurious Insects," American Museum Natural History.

