

Neighbors Don't Know She Exists, but Botanic Garden Curator Is Famous Over America



MISS ELOISE BUTLER IN HER BOTANICAL GARDENS

Eloise Butler Braves Bugs, Hoboes, Quicksands and Even "Old Andrew's" Ghost to Produce 1,100 Varieties of Flowers at Glenwood for School Study

"I think the men are afraid of the mosquitoes; I can't get them to start building my fence."

That is the plaint of Miss Eloise Butler, who is afraid of nothing on earth—bugs or hoboes or quicksands or even "Old Andrew's ghost"—whose next door neighbors don't know she exists but who is well known in the West Indies for her scientific expeditions there and whose love for flowers has spread the fame of Minnesota's Glenwood park botanical gardens all across the United States.

Ask a resident of the Glenwood park district where the "wild botanic garden" is and he probably will say that he doesn't believe there is such a place. But ask a professor of any large university in the country and he will know all about it and Miss Butler too. Hardly a day passes without a distinguished visitor from some part of the country.

Begins Work with First Buds

Armed with a large garden knife and a park policeman's star, Miss Butler works in the garden from early morning till late at night, from the day the first leaf shows green until after the frosts come in the fall. The winters she spends with her relatives in Malden, Mass.

A descendant of the British Duke of Ormond, she made three expeditions to the West Indies in search of algae before she started teaching botany.

Every plant in the garden has a history, from the "turtle head" and the white snake root to the "lizard tail" from Kentucky and the pink "false dragon head," violets, asters of 37 varieties, dark purple iron weed and white "ghost flower."

Tales Make Hearers Shiver

Last night Miss Butler sat in her little curator's office in the depths of the garden, designed by herself and covered outside with "Dutchman's pipe"—a large leaved vine—and inside with pictures of birds and flowers. She was persuaded to reminisce about the starting of the garden 17 years ago.

As she told of the hoboes and the quicksand and the "ghosts of the garden," the shadows lengthened into night, little shivers ran up and down the spines of her hearers and they almost expected to see "Old Andrew the Hermit" stalk out of the dense undergrowth. The fragrance of ferns and flowers was in the air and the hush

and Greek in Minneapolis schools, and then turned to botany which she loved best and taught in South high school for 35 years. The wild botanic garden was started at the request of botany teachers to have specimens of all Minnesota flowers in one accessible place. Now there are more than 1,000 different varieties in the garden.

Doesn't Believe in Ghosts

"Of course, being New England born, I don't believe in ghosts," Miss Butler said. "But, years ago, when Glenwood lake was 'Keegan's lake,' an old hermit lived in a cave in the woods. Suddenly he disappeared. Three months later a body was discovered which was believed to be his. Anyway he was never heard of again.

"One day I was working in the garden and heard the sound of an ax chopping down trees. This is not allowed here and I made for the sound. As I approached it, it ceased, and I could find no one. This continued all day at intervals.

"So the next day I went up and cleared out old Andrew's cave, and planted it with ferns. At the bottom of the rubbish I found a big old boot. I buried it deep and planted violets and trillium on top. And, whatever the reason, the sound of the ax was heard no more."

Sinks Into Quicksand

Miss Butler used to hunt plants in the tamarack swamp years before the garden was started, and one day she stepped right off into a quicksand and sank up to her armpits.

"It was no use shouting because nobody was within hearing distance," she said. "So I finally managed to wiggle myself out like an inch worm, all dripping wet and covered with mud. Next day I went back and measured it with a stick and it was 27 feet deep. No one every would have known what happened to me, as I had meant to go to St. Paul that day, and had told my friends so before I left the house."

A bird bath, scooped out of a huge stone, with little inch steps terraced out for all sizes of birds, attracts the feathered tribe. The birds give regular concerts there early each day as they bathe and sing to their heart's content.

Putting Up Fence Herself

Thousands of people every summer are shown through the gardens, and introduced to "puff ball flats," "fern gulch" and "aster hill" by Miss Butler.

"The fence is needed to keep out the few vandals who destroy in a few minutes the work of years and spoil the garden for the rest of the visitors," she said. Tiring of waiting years for it to be built, she finally is having it put up herself.