

# Annals of the Wild Life Reserve

## The Writings of Eloise Butler



### Finding the White Cypripedium - May 1914

I had but one clump of white *Cypripedium* in my wild garden and that had been given to me. What I bought from eastern florists refused to grow. This clump has blossomed for three years in succession, but this spring I had but one blossom because some vandal had picked the flowers the year before. I find that when the flowers of *Cypripediums* and trilliums are picked that they do not flower the following year. If any blossoms appear they are due to leafy stems that were infertile or without flowers. For, as you know, if the leaves - the food manufacturers - are picked off, no more food is stored up in the roots below for next year's growth.

The white *Cypripedium* is local. I had been told of various places where it grew profusely, but failed to find them. A friend 'phoned me a few days ago that she had spotted them several miles out of town. So we planned to "go for" them. We had to get up at five o'clock in order to make the train. When we left the train we expected to be met by another friend who was to drive us to the place to be explored several miles farther away. But no one was there. It had rained heavily the night before and was not yet clear so that no one dreamed that we would make the venture.



White Lady's-slipper,  
*Cypripedium candidum*. Photo  
©Derek Anderson, Wisconsin  
Flora.



Large-flowered Pentstemon  
(Showy Beardtongue),  
*Penstemon grandiflorus*.  
Photo ©G. D. Bebeau

Should we take the next train home? No, never! We kilted our skirts and weighted with impediments, trudged through the wet grass some three miles across the country until we found a farmer who was willing to take us where we were bound to go. We had a pair of stout farm horses and a long heavy truck, big enough and to spare. The *Tradescantia* [Spiderwort] was out in full force, set off by great clumps of orange puccoon, *Lithospermum gmelini* [this is an older name, most likely a variety of *Lithospermum caroliniense* that is native to Minnesota]. Now and then we passed patches of the strikingly beautiful large-flowered Pentstemon [*Penstemon grandiflorus*]. We drove as far as we could. Then we had to walk a long distance through meadows to reach our plants. It did not rain, and the overcast sky was the ideal condition for such a tramp. The meadows were full of yellow *Cypripedium*, both the large [*Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *pubescens*] and the small [*Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *makasin*] varieties, and scores of the showy *Cypripedium* [*Cypripedium regina*] in bud. We came upon large expanses of *Castilleja coccinea* [Scarlet Indian Paintbrush] with heavy heads of luxuriant scarlet bloom, with a few yellow ones by way of contrast. Never had we seen them in such magnificent profusion.

**The haunt of the white** Cypripediums was an open meadow full of hummocks of tufted grasses and sedges surrounded by deep pools of water. The flowers grew on the hummocks and were hard to spade on account of the intertwined and matted roots of the sedges. In drier meadows we found *Polygala senega* [Seneca Snake Root], *Valeriana edulis* [Tobacco root] just going out of blossom, and *zygadene* [*Zigadenus elegans* - white camass] and Turk's-cap and wood lilies in bud. On an unwooded hill was a spring surrounded by pitcher plants in full flower and all the different Cypripediums again.

I had never seen pitcher plants in such a situation before. The soil was peculiar -- a fine gray colored clay, seemingly intermixed with sand. We were enthusiastic over our "finds." My friend said, "California can't offer anything equal to this!"

We packed our treasures in gunny sacks and had no difficulty in getting them home, as we were met by autos at the other end of the line.



Seneca Snake Root, *Polygala senega*. Photo ©Aaron Carlson, Wisconsin Flora.

### Notes:

To facilitate identification of plants, we have taken the liberty of adding the information that is within brackets and also all the botanical names have been put into italics. The language of Eloise's day is left as written. Additional notes at the bottom of the page.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©as credited

The text of this article is one of a number of short essays that Eloise Butler wrote while curator of the Garden that after her death were collected in a series titled *Annals of the Wild Life Reserve*, but most were never published.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Wirth Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.