

The Writings of Eloise Butler



The Wild Garden in 1925

A most unusual season --spotted, indeed, if due to sun spots. In April, very hot wether that unduly stimulated vegetation. Then late frosts -- ice forming May 26 -- that nipped aspiring flower buds. Some things were frozen four times. Therefore, no wild grapes, no May apples, nor several flowers. During May, heavy rains and cold weather, so that we said, "We'll not complain when the sun roasts us." June 2 a tornado swooped upon us from the northwest, uprooting trees and laying everything flat with wreckage. Fortunately, only a few lives were lost. The damages cannot be repaired in years. Through August and not yet fairly broken the most protracted drought ever recorded in Minnesota. The hillsides in the Reserve have suffered severely but the asters are holding their own fairly well. The usual crop of mushroom is a complete failure.

Have had some pleasant outing to break general dismalness. Went out on the prairies early in July when the wood lily mingled with the tall cream-colored spikes of zyadene at its height, and on the low lands, large masses of showy moccasin flowers disported themselves. In August, spent two days at Lake Kabecona, about twenty miles east of Itasca Park. There I saw for the first time in their native haunts the spurred gentian [*Halenia deflexa*] and the northern grass of parnassus [*Parnassia palustris*]. On a creek floated the pretty white water crowfoot in full blossom, and all the land was blue with harebells.

Strange to say, a little earlier, a single specimen of *Halenia* was brought to me from the north to identify. From the venation, I thought it must be an endogen and tried to place it in the lily or orchid families. Over the telephone I got a hint from one who knew, that is must belong to the gentian family, although the name could not be recalled. The small flowers were cream colored and spurred. Then "spurred gentian" flashed through my mind, and also the scientific name, *Halenia deflexa*, although I had no consciousness of previous knowledge. The botanist confirmed the wireless telegram. This is another instance of several experiences that I have had of unconscious registration. We all really know much more than we are aware of . . .



Spurred Gentian, *Halenia deflexa*. Photo ©Robert Bierman, Wisconsin Flora

[Thanks to Martha Hellander for unearthing this bit of writing]

NOTES:

Since Eloise Butler's time, the scientific names of plants and the classification of plant families has undergone extensive revision. In brackets within the text, have been added when necessary, the revised scientific name for the references she used in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America*, and the *Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*. Other information in brackets may add clarification to what she is saying.

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

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. This essay however, was sent to the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, division D, of the Agassiz Association for their circular bulletin. Eloise was a member of Division D (the middle west) from 1908 until her death. Those bulletins were circulated among members by postal round-robin circulation. The Agassiz Association was founded in the late 1800's to be an association of local chapters that would combine the like interests of individuals and organizations in the study of nature but after 1901 was largely defunct and only the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, with its several divisions, was still active and remained so until 1943.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of first page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. The other photo as credited.