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*Lilium michauxii* Poir. Carolina lily. From the inaugural exhibition featuring the work of pioneer ecologist B. W. Wells.

## ***B. W. Wells: Pioneer Ecologist***

By Monica McCormick, Digital Publishing Center



*Platanthera nivea* (Nutt.) Luer. *Savannah white orchid*. Bertram Whittier Wells Collection, Special Collections Research Center [Wells Collection, SCRC].

With a passion for nature, high standards for scientific rigor, and a critical eye for aesthetics, North Carolina State University Professor Bertram Whittier Wells (1884–1978) spent his life studying, documenting, and teaching about the ecology of North Carolina. The **B. W. Wells Collection**, preserved in the NCSU Libraries' Special Collections Research Center, will be featured in an exhibit sponsored by the NCSU Libraries in partnership with NC State's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and its Department of Plant Biology, and the North Carolina Agricultural Foundation. Opening in March 2007, the exhibit will inaugurate a new, museum-quality gallery created as part of a major renovation to D. H. Hill Library. The displays will emphasize the beauty and significance of Wells's photographs and highlight his accomplishments as scientist and conservation pioneer.

Wells served as head of the botany department (now plant biology) from 1919 to 1949 and continued teaching until 1954, leaving an impressive and lasting legacy. Throughout his career, Wells traveled in every part of North Carolina, camera in hand, recording his discoveries. He defined the ecological zones of the state, describing the plants found in each and the environmental conditions that explained their locations. He published his findings and his photographs in a broad range of scientific journals and popular publications. He also created a set of glass lantern slides of landscapes and plants—many hand-tinted—that visually documented North Carolina's ecology from the coast to the western mountains. These slides illustrated his lectures to students, scientific societies, and gardening clubs across the state, and they will be a centerpiece of the exhibit.

*B. W. Wells, 1977*  
*[Wells Collection, SCRC].*



The exhibition will feature Wells's work to study and preserve the Big Savannah of Pender County. This unique grassy ecosystem—filled with rare plants and first observed by Wells from a train window while headed to Wilmington in 1920—became a focus of his research and teaching, a site of field excursions with students and other visitors throughout his career. Wells would eventually lose his fight to save the Big Savannah when crops were planted there in the late 1950s. However, in a remarkable turn of events, land ecologically similar to the Big Savannah was discovered nearby in the late 1990s. This time, preservation efforts succeeded, and the land was dedicated as the B. W. Wells Savannah in 2002 to honor his efforts in documenting the extraordinary value of this unique landscape. The exhibit will display specimen photographs taken at the Savannah by Wells, along with contemporary images of the magnificent variety of plants found at the preserved site taken by North Carolina photographer Freda Wilkins.



*[Above right] Lilium catesbaei. Savannah lily*  
*[Wells Collection, SCRC].*

*[Bottom right] Platanthera ciliaris (L.) Lindl. Wells*  
*Common Name: Yellow-fringed orchids*  
*[Wells Collection, SCRC].*





Other facets of the exhibit will explore Wells's lasting contributions to the university and the public. In his long career, he expanded and improved the botany program to provide a stimulating environment for students and faculty. The Plant Biology Herbarium is filled with specimens he collected throughout the state. His field trips proved popular with students and the general public, featuring vigorous hikes and intense study. In 1932 he published *The Natural Gardens of North Carolina* to "assist the amateur plant lover in learning the common names of the herbaceous wild flowers" while avoiding "technicalities" primarily of interest to professional botanists. The book was reprinted in 1967 and again in 2002, indicating its abiding value.

The exhibition will contain a variety of artifacts including publications written by Wells regarding the ecology of North Carolina, manuscript materials documenting the tremendous impact he had at NC State, the camera he used to capture the lantern slide images, personal effects, and paintings Wells created in retirement. The Libraries will produce an accompanying catalog, beautifully illustrated with color images; essays on Wells; as well as the story of the discovery, loss, and preservation of the Savannah landscape. A Web site and database of digital and digitized images of the complete collection of photographs will be maintained to provide access to scholars, students, and others interested in North Carolina ecology. ❖



*Venus' Fly-trap flowers. Botanical Name: Dionaea muscipula Ellis. [Wells Collection, SCRC]*



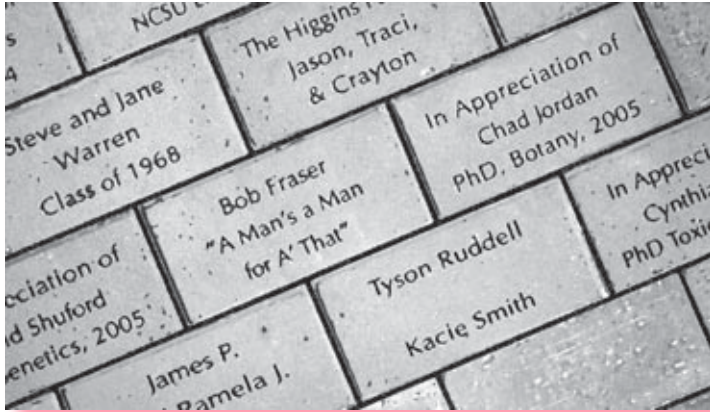
*A close up of a double-flowering dogwood. Botanical Name: Cornus florida L. [Wells Collection, SCRC]*



*Panicum virgatum L. var. virgatum Switchgrass. Common Name: Tall panic grass. [Wells Collection, SCRC]*



*Sarracenia flava L. Insect-catching yellow trumpets. [Wells Collection, SCRC]*



## Paving the Way

By JIM RUTH, NCSU LIBRARIES FELLOW

Library supporters came together to share fond memories of their connection with the NCSU Libraries at the special dedication ceremony held on September 14, 2006, to celebrate the “Building a Dream One Brick at a Time” campaign, which supports the current D. H. Hill Library renovations and planning for the future library on Centennial Campus.

The NC State a cappella student group, Grains of Time, serenaded attendees as they gathered on the mezzanine in front of the D. H. Hill Library. Friends of the Library Board President **Cyma Rubin** opened the program to thank all the donors who had purchased bricks in honor or in memory of friends and family. Vice Provost and Director of Libraries **Susan K. Nutter** then joined Rubin to dedicate two large commemorative bricks that together read:

**BUILDING A DREAM ONE BRICK AT A TIME**  
**Dedicated on September 14, 2006.**  
**Friends of the Library**  
**North Carolina State University**

Three individuals who purchased bricks shared their stories about the Libraries at the conclusion of the program. **Frank Abrams**, a revered NC State faculty member and former senior vice provost for academic affairs at the university, purchased a brick in honor of his children Cameron and Bradley to ensure they would always have a place at North Carolina State University. **Rebecca Swanson**, associate vice provost for distance education, spoke on behalf of the entire Distance Education and Learning Technology Applications (DELTA) team, explaining how Tom Miller, vice provost for distance education and learning technology, inspired them. Finally, **Linda Stone** shared the touching story behind the brick dedicated in memory of her father, the late Roy A. Larson, an internationally known poinsettia breeder who served thirty-five years on the faculty of NC State’s Department of Horticultural Science. Stone also recalled

playing hide-and-seek as a young girl among the D. H. Hill Library bookstacks.

The Libraries’ “Building a Dream One Brick at a Time” campaign officially opened in 2005 and gained momentum as 2006 came to a close. The NCSU Libraries wishes to thank all those who have already contributed by buying a brick and would like to encourage others to help support the campaign in a similar way. To find out more about how to purchase a brick, go to the Web site at <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/bricks>. ❖

*NC State’s a cappella student group Grains of Time.*





*Focus*, a newsletter published three times a year, seeks to promote the services, activities, needs, and interests of the NCSU Libraries to the university, the Friends of the Library, and beyond.

Editor: Terrell Armistead Crow.

NCSU Libraries Homepage: <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/>