

The Charles T. Mohr Herbarium Internship

By Carol Ann McCormick, Assistant Curator, UNC Herbarium

This last December, the UNC Herbarium became the unexpected beneficiary of the Class of 1954's 50th Reunion. Alumna Elizabeth Burch Heston, of Hanover, New Hampshire, was inspired to contribute to the University, and since her passion is gardening—daylilies in particular—she decided that the North Carolina Botanical Garden was the logical place for her gift.

In discussing her gift, Ms. Heston mentioned that Dr. Charles T. Mohr was her great-great-grandfather. The Herbarium staff was pleased to tell her that we have found about 50 of Dr. Mohr's specimens in our collection, and as we continue to database, we will surely find more! In December 2004, Ms. Heston honored her ancestor by founding and endowing the Charles T. Mohr Herbarium Internship Fund to be used to support student interns working with mentors at the University of North Carolina Herbarium.

Charles Mohr was born in Germany on December 28, 1824, and led a peripatetic life. Interests in geology, botany, chemistry led him to Dutch Guiana (present-day Suriname), the California gold fields, Indiana, Kentucky, and finally to Mobile, Alabama, in 1857.

He put his knowledge of chemistry and botany to work by opening a pharmacy, which in 1885 boasted to be "the sole manufacturers of Mohr's Emulsion Cod Liver Oil with Hypophosphites, Mohr's Syr. Photo-iodide Iron and Manganese, and Elixir *Pycnanthemum* (new Anti-Dyspepsia Remedy)."

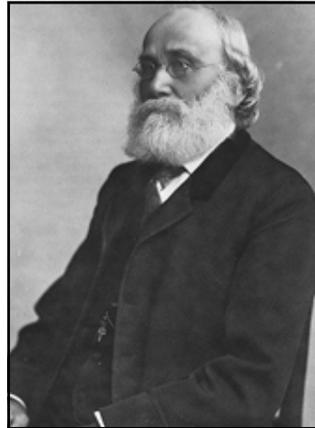
By 1870 Mohr devoted his studies to botany and formed a close professional and personal friendship with Dr. Eugene Allen Smith, director of the Geological Survey of Alabama and professor at University of Alabama. The two decided to produce a flora for the state, a project that would take the rest of Mohr's life to complete. "To assist you in getting up a Catalogue of the plants of our state will be a labor of love and pleasure to me," wrote Mohr to Smith.

Mohr greatly enjoyed fieldwork, and traveled by rail, foot, and mule to find plants. L. J. Davenport, author of a very informative article on Mohr for *Alabama Heritage*, recounted:

According to Lida B. Robertson, one of Mohr's Mobile neighbors, on one occasion, Mohr – with his long hair, gray whiskers, and his "botanizing box," which he carried across his shoulders like a pack – was mistaken for Santa Claus by two small children who were so excited that they ran home "as fast as their short limbs could bear them." When Mohr stopped at the children's home a few hours later, he was invited to supper. Mohr kept up the pretense that he was Santa Claus, and the next Christmas he sent the children a "bountiful pack."

Not all of his expeditions were so pleasant. In 1849 Mohr and fifty other members of the Cincinnati Gold Mining & Trading Company set out for Californian mule-drawn wagons. Mohr, of course, collected and pressed plants along the way. As terrain grew rougher, the group was forced to abandoned equipment along the trail. Rather than relinquish his hard-won plant collection, Mohr traded his gun to a Sioux in exchange for a pack horse. By July, however, the situation was dire:

Unable to transport his books and plant collection, a distraught Mohr dumped them in the Snake River. As a botanist friend later described it: "This was a loss which caused the deepest regret to the young collector, and one which can be appreciated only by those who have known by experience the labor, cost, and delight of collecting unrecognized material in an unknown region."



Mohr is best known as author of "Plant Life of Alabama, an Account of the Distributions, Modes of Association, and Adaptations of the Flora of Alabama, Together with a Systematic Catalogue of the Plants Growing in the State," a 900-page tome published just weeks after his death in 1901.

An ambitious project for our first C. T. Mohr Intern might be to catalogue and map all of the Herbarium's specimens of rare, threatened, and endangered plants of the southeastern United States. Included in that list would be the Alabama & Georgia native wildflower *Marshallia mohrii*, named for Dr. Mohr!

The Herbarium is pleased to have Dr. Mohr's specimens in our collection and Dr. Mohr's descendants as our friends and supporters.

To make a contribution to or obtain more information about the Charles T. Mohr Internship Fund, please contact Charlotte Jones-Roe, Associate Director for Development at the Garden: (919) 962-9458 or jonesroe@unc.edu

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