

## Book Review

William R. Burk. 2023. **Putting Down Roots: Foundations of Botany at Carolina**. BRIT Press, Fort Worth, Texas. 616 p. Paperback, \$45.00. ISBN 978-1889878713

This volume delves into the evolution of the field of botany at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1792 to 1982. Readers can immerse themselves in the lives and teachings of the distinguished life science professors who shaped the university's first century, as their biographical narratives, educational methodologies, scientific guidance, and invaluable contributions to the scientific community are meticulously documented herein. The book uncovers the profound legacies each distinguished educator left on the institution, from Denison Olmsted to George Atkinson and beyond. A dedicated chapter, encompassing a substantial portion of the narrative, sheds light on the establishment of the UNC Department of Botany in 1908. The focus is directly placed on the department's milestones, its esteemed faculty, and the scholarly journey of its developing graduate students. Woven throughout the text are several prominent UNC legacies, including the University Museum's influence, the conceptualization of an exemplary agricultural facility, the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society's pivotal impacts, and the integration of laboratory practices into the curriculum. While this book has several key selling points, there is nowhere it shines more than in its immaculate research and attention to detail. In fact, the book's thorough research and impeccable documentation serve as a testament to the author's dedication to unearthing every facet of the botanical roots of Carolina. This dedication is evident not only in the sheer volume of sources meticulously curated, but also in the careful selection of each reference used to build a cohesive and authoritative timeline.

Most modern, formally trained botanists will know of Elisha Mitchell. While serving on the faculty of the University of North Carolina, Professor Mitchell (1793-1857) left an indelible mark on the realm of plant biology through many contributions. As a distinguished botanist, his detailed studies of plant distribution led to insights into the flora of the Appalachian region. Mitchell's dedication to plant biology not only enriched scientific understanding but also played a crucial role in shaping early environmental conservation efforts. His keen observations of plant distribution, adaptations, and interactions laid the groundwork for a deeper comprehension of botanical diversity, a legacy that continues to inspire ecological research to this day. When I read the entry on Elisha and the largely mundane academic documents belonging to him, I felt a kinship with this scholar—perhaps some things never change. Likewise, I feel a sort of nostalgia looking at a picture of his pocket watch; reminding me of trinkets I have received from influential botanists in my life; some of whom are no longer with us. A book like this pays homage to the work of so many responsible for establishing botany at Carolina and indeed across the southeastern United States.

Of the many outstanding accomplishments to emerge from the University of North Carolina system, the Highlands Biological Station (HBS) plays a critical role in botany education in the southeastern United States. The HBS stands as a haven for scientific exploration amidst the landscapes of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Nestled in the heart of North Carolina's highlands, this field research facility offers a unique vantage point for scholars, students, and enthusiasts alike to delve into the region's rich biodiversity. The station's diverse ecosystems, ranging from lush forests to intricate aquatic habitats, provide an ideal setting for studying a wide array of ecological questions. With a legacy spanning over eight decades, the Highlands Biological Station continues to foster collaboration, education, and discovery, making it a cornerstone of ecological research and conservation in the southeastern United States. While there may be separate works fully dedicated to documenting the history of Highlands, its inclusion in this book is most welcome. I know many friends, colleagues, collaborators, and students who have benefited greatly from their time at HBS. It truly serves as one of the greatest legacies to emerge from the collective work of many great scientists.

*Putting Down Roots: Foundations of Botany at Carolina* is a masterful reference, meticulously researched and presented in a very clear, concise manner. I likely wouldn't read this book for the narrative, though a narrative can be drawn. Indeed, it is much closer to a reference text—but what a wonderful reference text it is.

—*Jeremy D. Rentsch, Ph.D.; Associate Professor of Biology and Shirley Malloy Chair of Biology,  
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