

## CBHL Archivists Group Now Formed!

Archivists Connor Munzert (Longwood Gardens) and Nicole Font (New York Botanical Garden) have formed a dedicated Archivists Group within CBHL. The purpose of this group is to provide a collaborative space for archivists and related professionals working with botanical and horticultural collections to share expertise, ask questions, and discuss projects. You do not need to be an archivist to join the meetings. Anyone working with botanical and horticultural archives is welcome!

So far, the group has discussed a wide range of topics, including general archival processes, working with donations of archival materials, reprocessing and reparative description, digitization of archival materials, and more.

The group meets on the first Wednesday of every month, with meeting times alternating between 11:00 AM and 2:00 PM Eastern. The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, April 1 at 11:00 AM. More information, including the Zoom link, will be shared via the CBHL listserv. We hope to see you there!

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### CBHL Members' East News

Edited by Nicole Font

Shelby White & Leon Levy Processing Archivist

LuEsther T. Mertz Library

New York Botanical Garden

### A Botanical Road Trip: Libraries, Art, and Gardens from Chicago to Rockford

Kristen Mastel

Head Librarian & Curator

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University of Minnesota Libraries

This past fall, I hit the road for a whirlwind botanical tour that blended CBHL networking, horticultural inspiration, and a healthy dose of library love. My destination: the Chicago area, home to some of the Midwest's most remarkable garden institutions and botanical libraries.

My first stop was the Chicago Botanic Garden, where I had the pleasure of touring the Lenhardt Library with Leora Siegel, Donna Herendeen, and other library staff members. Their hospitality and deep knowledge made the visit especially meaningful, offering a behind-the-scenes look at their *Patterned by Nature* exhibit, collections, services, and ongoing projects. While there, we also gathered for a CBHL regional meet-up, which included a special outing to the Driehaus Museum



Above and below: Rory McEwen exhibition at the Driehaus Museum. Photos by Suzi Teghtmeyer.



to view the stunning Rory McEwen exhibition—a breathtaking display of botanical art that left us all inspired.

Rory McEwen holds a singular place in the world of botanical art, and the exhibition offered a rare opportunity to appreciate the full arc of his creative evolution. In addition to showcasing his extraordinary paintings, the exhibit included books from the Oak Spring Garden Library—similar books to what McEwen studied closely and drew inspiration from throughout his career. Seeing these historical works alongside his own artwork illuminated how deeply he engaged with botanical traditions while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of the genre. It was equally fascinating to observe how his style shifted over time, moving from meticulous botanical precision to more abstract, atmospheric interpretations. Experiencing this progression in-person underscored the breadth of his artistic vision and the lasting influence he continues to have on contemporary botanical artists.

From there, I continued on to The Morton Arboretum, where I visited with Rita Hassert, Library Collections Manager at the Sterling Morton Library. Rita provided a warm welcome and a fascinating look at the Arboretum’s rich library collections and history. It was amazing to see paintings by Maria Sybilla Merian’s daughter, Johanna Helena Herolt, as my library’s current exhibit was all about Merian.

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On the drive back home, I decided to make the most of my APGA membership and added two more stops to the itinerary: Anderson Japanese Gardens and the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens, both in Rockford, Illinois. The sites offered peaceful and beautiful spaces that were well worth the detour.

This road trip was a wonderful reminder of our strong network of botanical libraries, deep expertise, and colleagues that make our field so vibrant. Each stop offered something unique, and together they created a journey filled with learning, connection, and inspiration. Is your library or garden hosting an exhibit in 2026, or a local museum that might be of interest to CBHL members? Consider putting out a call for CBHL members to join in for a visit to build community and connections. Thank you Leora for hosting our first regional meet up!



*Left to right: Beth Hassert, Stacy Stoldt, Rita Hassert, Leora Siegel, Donna Herendeen, Suzi Teghtmeyer, Kristen Mastel, Amanda Lettner.  
Photo by Suzi Teghtmeyer.*

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# Calendar of Upcoming Events

Compiled by Rita M. Hassert

Library Collections Manager

Sterling Morton Library, The Morton Arboretum

## **April 19-25, 2026**

American Library Association (ALA)

National Library Week

<http://www.ala.org/nlw>

## **May 12-15, 2026**

Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries (CBHL)

58th Annual Meeting

*Books | Blooms | Brandywine Valley: Celebrating Libraries, Archives, and Gardens*

Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

<http://www.cbhl.net>

## **May 20-23, 2026**

American Alliance of Museums (AAM)

2026 Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

<https://annualmeeting.aam-us.org/>

## **June 8-12, 2026**

American Public Gardens Association (APGA)

2026 Conference

San Francisco, California

<http://www.publicgardens.org>

## **June 23-26, 2026**

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) Conference

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

<https://rbms.info/>

## **June 25-29, 2026**

American Library Association (ALA)

Annual Conference and Exhibition

Chicago, Illinois

<http://www.ala.org>

## **July 13-16, 2026**

American Horticultural Society (AHS)

34th Annual National Children & Youth Garden Symposium

Pasadena, California

<https://ahsgardening.org/ncygs-2026/>

## **July 29-August 1, 2026**

Society of American Archivists (SAA)

Annual Meeting

New Orleans, Louisiana

<https://www2.archivists.org/am2026>

## **August 1-5, 2026**

Botanical Society of America (BSA)

Botany 2026

Tucson, Arizona

<http://botany.org>

## Book Reviews

Edited by Gillian Hayward  
Library Manager  
Library and Information Services  
Longwood Gardens

*Bad Naturalist: One Woman's Ecological Education on a Wild Virginia Mountaintop* by Paula Whyman.  
New York: Timber Press, 2025. 253 pages. \$30.00.  
ISBN: 9781643262178.

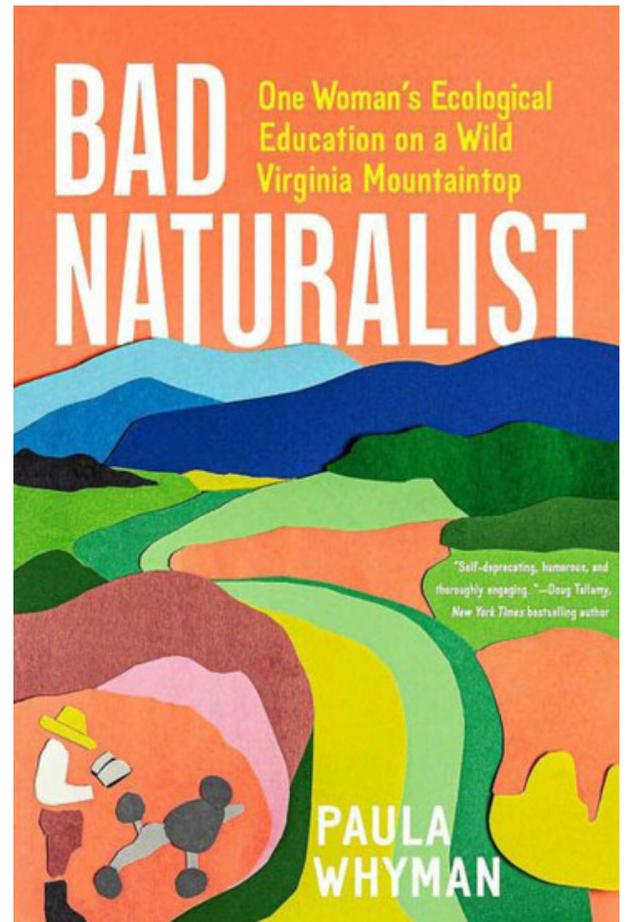
Reviewed by Genelle Schuler  
Librarian Supervisor, Shirlington Branch  
Arlington Public Library, Arlington, Virginia

In her witty and light-hearted memoir, Paula Whyman invites readers to join her on a delightfully bumpy, epic adventure as a self-proclaimed “Bad Naturalist.” With little gardening experience and a history of animal rescue mishaps, she sets out to rewild her two hundred acres of

land in the Blue Ridge Mountains; creating a native meadow and protecting local wildlife. What follows is a series of misadventures. Arranged in three parts, each chapter of the memoir opens with a playful epigraph that hints at the chaos to come. She recounts her efforts with charm, candor, and a self-deprecating humor that endears the reader to the narrative and prevents it from being overly sentimental.

Whyman's approach to this heroic endeavor is rooted in diligent research, as she tries to use recommended conservation land management best practices. She consults The Prescribed Fire Council and learns that “many of the ecosystems across Virginia's diverse landscapes were shaped by the frequent presence of fire over thousands of years. Virginia's forests and grasslands are well-adapted to fire, with plant species that have survival or regeneration strategies that not only tolerate fire but some may require it.” Crabapples (*Malus angustifolia*), blueberries (*Vaccinium pallidum*), and white oaks (*Quercus alba*) are a few fire-resistant species found in the Blue Ridge Mountains. However, she quickly discovers that not all advice is as straightforward as the suggestions regarding fire-adapted plants. In fact, she learns that some expert advice is often contradictory and attempting to apply elements of these conflicting practices often leads to unintended outcomes—such as inadvertently encouraging invasive species or learning that some weeds thrive after pruning. Mishaps such as these are sprinkled throughout the book and will resonate with horticulturists familiar with the unpredictable nature of ecological restoration.

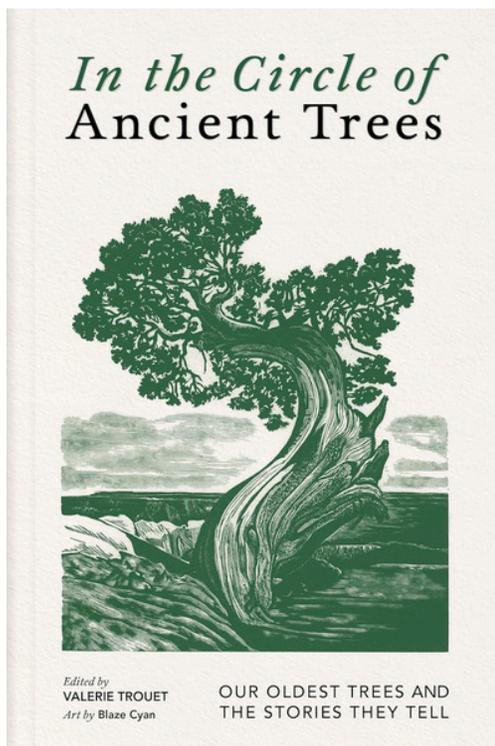
Every hero needs a worthy foe, and Whyman faces a formidable lineup of noxious weeds, including kudzu



(*Pueraria montana*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), Autumn Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*), and Paulownia (*Paulownia tomentosa*), to name a few. Her battles with these pernicious, botanical villains highlight the unintended consequences of human interference in nature. These invasives were all introduced by humans for either ornamental landscape or agricultural purposes, and the introduction of these invasives has necessitated the need for ongoing responsible human intervention in the Blue Ridge Mountains. But it's not all doom and gloom. The narrative references the precursor to recent Virginia legislation (HB 1941/SB 1166). The 2025 legislation, HB 1941/SB 1166, mandates the educational labeling of invasive plants in retail settings. This recent development will be of interest to both librarians and horticulturists tracking environmental policy and advocating for public awareness.

Through it all, the author stands as a relatable champion of conservation, promoting the Hawaiian principle of “Kahu,” which emphasizes caretaking over control. She celebrates learning through trial and error and reinforces that stewardship is about observation and measured intervention, rather than control. The narrative offers valuable insights for librarians curating environmental literature collections and horticulturists engaged in native plant restoration and invasive species management. Fans of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Michael Pollan, and Elizabeth Hilborn, along with anyone who's ever felt out of their depth in the garden, will find Whyman's story both comforting and inspiring. Her humor, honesty, and Sisyphean determination make her the kind of eco-warrior we can all root for. I picture Whyman standing tall, arms akimbo atop her piece of rock, hair blowing over one eye obscuring her view: a perfectly imperfect vision of the ecological everywoman that we all need.

As Henry Moore's quote at the start of the memoir suggests, the best tasks are the ones we can never fully complete—so go on, Whyman, keep pushing that boulder!



*In the Circle of Ancient Trees: Our Oldest Trees and the Stories They Tell*, edited by Valerie Trouet. Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2025. 224 pages. \$30.00. ISBN 9781778402685.

Reviewed by Will Jones

Technical Services Librarian

Richmont Graduate University, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Counting tree rings is the first way many of us learned to interact with natural history as children: there is something astonishing, and even a little eerie, about seeing the entire living history of an ancient life spread before us, a history we can touch with our fingers. Dendrochronologists take this process further, attempting to read the data preserved in the heart of some of the oldest organisms on earth to answer questions about ancient climates, forests, and human cultures. *In the Circle of Ancient Trees*

(Greystone Books, 2025) provides an excellent survey of both the scientists who do this kind of work and the miraculous trees they study.

As editor Valerie Trouet explains in her introduction, most trees undergo annual patterns of growth and dormancy, which are recorded in their growth rings. Researchers may then use these growth rings to determine past growing conditions, or even crossdate them with other samples taken from trees growing in the same region and experiencing similar climatic conditions. Trouet writes that it is through this process of meticulously crossdating samples taken from living, dead, or even fossilized trees that scientists may begin to construct a chronology of regional climate data stretching back thousands of years.

The book is divided into ten chapters, each written by a different researcher and devoted to a single species of tree. Every continent (with the obvious exception of Antarctica) is represented, as well as a tremendous diversity of ecologies, from tropical rainforests to alpine ridgetops to deserts. As the title suggests, the tree species surveyed are all very old, but some are much older than others, particularly the bristlecone pine (*Pinus longaeva*) of the United States and the Lañilawal (*Fitzroya cupressoides*) of Chile, perhaps the oldest living organisms in the world.

The book functions as a survey not only of individual tree species but also of the sorts of questions dendrochronology aims to answer: questions about climate change, both past and future; about the effects of fires and storms on the forests of the past; and about the histories of human cultures, including the ages of their artifacts and their periods of drought, famine, and floods. In one chapter, ecologist Matthew Therrell describes how cores taken from thousand-year-old Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) trees in the swamps of Virginia and North Carolina proved conclusively that terrible droughts – the worst of the millennium – had likely contributed to the abandonment of the Lost Colony of Roanoke in 1589, as well as the "starving time" experienced by the Jamestown Colony in the winter of 1609. Another researcher, Gretel Boswijk, describes how she used the rings of New Zealand's kauri tree (*Agathis australis*) to create a chronology of climate events, particularly the effects of the ENSO (El Niño-Southern Oscillation) current in the South Pacific going back almost 5,000 years.

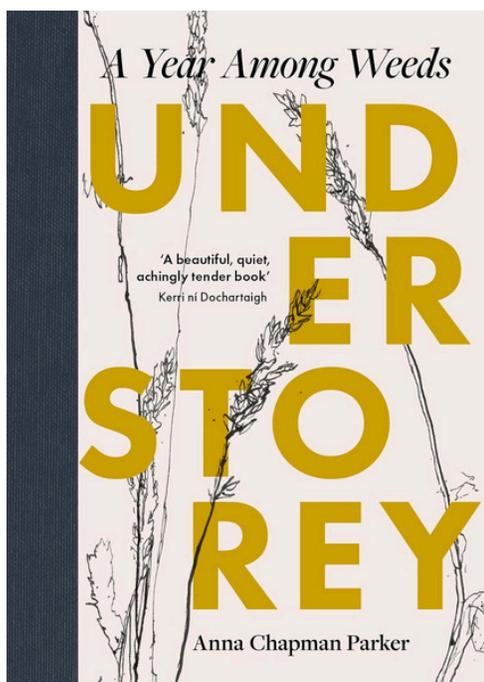
The work of dendrochronology is painstaking – in years of drought or stress, some slow-growing trees may create seasonal growth rings no wider than a single cell, visible only with a microscope. Core samples must be cross-referenced with samples from other trees in the same area, a process that often requires computer programs running complex statistical models to complete. The work also can require no small measure of courage and physical strength. Ecologist Daniela Granato-Souza describes her quest to locate ancient specimens of the cedro (*Cedrela odorata*) in remote sections of the Brazilian Amazon basin where illegal mining and logging operations are common, and the presence of law enforcement or rescue services almost non-existent. Bulgarian forester Momchil Panayotov traverses sheer cliff-faces to collect core samples from the oldest living specimens of Bosnian pine (*Pinus heldreichii*), only for the bit of his coring tool to break off inside the tree. Even then, the data generated by core samples can be frustratingly inconclusive, with anatomical anomalies and years of suppressed growth making it difficult or impossible to date samples with complete confidence. But the rewards of a successful

dendrochronology project are more than sufficient compensation for the challenges: millenia's worth of regional climate data, a precise date for the construction of a Puebloan village, or the crafting of a Stradivarius violin.

But just as interesting to this reader are the personal testimonies of the researchers, most having seemed to have arrived at dendrochronology as a kind of fortunate accident from other fields. Botanists, ecologists, foresters, climatologists – the contributors to this volume represent a range of scientific disciplines from institutions around the world. Paleoclimatologist Malcolm Hughes writes, "Studying these forest ecosystems inevitably led me toward events on timescales of decades and centuries. For this, it became clear that a reliable timekeeper was needed. That's where tree rings came in."

Tree rings may provide a great deal of insight into past climatic conditions, but a note of uncertainty hangs over the entire book: what will be the future of these organisms and the habitats that produced them? That these trees have survived so long is no guarantee that they will successfully adapt to anthropogenic climate change. Some of the contributors express hope that by studying the ways in which these trees have adapted to past climatic disruptions, we will be able to better anticipate how our forests will respond to warming climates. After all, it is not just the lives of these ancient trees that are imperiled, but the entire ecosystem on which we depend.

Blaze Cyan's illustrations for each chapter bear special mention: they are wood engravings of almost astonishing power, managing to present the life of each ancient tree in all of its gnarled and twisted sinuosity. The engravings combine a rigorous attention to plant physiology with a deeply romantic sensibility, tapping into the strange and sublime life at the heart of the earth's oldest living things. The dark intensity of the illustrations contrasts with the restrained and often understated prose of each chapter. The engravings of the Kauri, the pendunculate oak, and the Qilian juniper are by themselves each worth the price of the book.



*Understorey: A Year Among Weeds* by Anna Chapman Parker. Richmond, UK: Duckworth Books, 2024. 283 pages, illustrations. \$45.00. ISBN 9780715655207 [hardcover, also available in paperback]

Reviewed by Maura C. Flannery  
Research Affiliate

A.C. Moore Herbarium  
University of South Carolina

There are a number of books that deal with common weeds, but this one takes a novel approach. It is not a guide to weeds and how to control them or use them as food, medicine, etc. It does have illustrations, but they are not the kind that would necessarily help in

identification. Instead, it presents a much more personal relationship with the kinds of plants we are likely to encounter in everyday life.

Anna Chapman Parker lives in Northumberland, admittedly the least populated county in England, so she probably has a richer variety of weeds outside her door than many of us do. But anyone could take her approach of meeting them where they grow and then quickly sketching them. She writes about these encounters, discussing not only the weeds, but the circumstances in which she finds them—on walks, in the garden on a quick break while an evening meal simmers, or when keeping an eye on her children at play. She is an artist and writer who decided to spend a year noticing weeds, and her endeavor has resulted in a wonderful book.

Chapman's drawings are essentially pen-and-ink sketches done hastily in the minutes captured as she pursues her busy life. Her goal is to "describe an object with line—to delineate—mostly a construct of interpretation, a mark of pragmatism or expedience rather than realism. But it's that line I want . . . a response made line by line through a period of looking" (p. 27). The results are varied depending upon the time she has and her subject. Daisies and dandelions are easily identifiable, but it would be difficult to name the plants in her rendering of a grassy bank in February. But then again, it would be difficult to do this when looking directly at it; Chapman is going for impressions, and she succeeds in capturing them. That's one of the reasons I was taken with this book. I am a mediocre artist who loves to draw the plants I come upon, and her approach is one I can relate to. She writes that she wants to notice the particular, that the point is to be there and look, and for a short while to put aside everything else.

The writing is mesmerizing. It is about ordinary plants woven into an ordinary life and trying to be as immersed in nature as possible. It is a meditative book, for which the drawings are a perfect match. But there are also other illustrations. As an artist, Chapman is very mindful of those who have taken different approaches to representing the same weedy plants she's attracted to. In tackling brambles, she decides they are so complex, that the only solution is to focus on details. This conjures up for her the image of brambles in the *Vienna Codex*, or *Vienna Dioscurides*, the 6<sup>th</sup>-century herbal with plant images that are amazingly realistic. The dandelion brings to mind an Anna Atkins cyanotype of the plant, and of course, Albrecht Dürer's Great Piece of Turf is also included.

Brambles and dandelions are mentioned more than once in the book because Chapman considers it important in laying out a year of weeds, to see how areas change over time. That's one of the joys of walking familiar paths, even when conditions are less than ideal. She writes of going out on cold and windy days, or when rain is threatening. At one point, raindrops start landing on her page and smearing the ink. She lets it happen, incorporating the stains to document the day. That is the beauty of her book, she writes so authentically of what it is to attempt to live in nature, weaving it into so many other parts of her life. There is real depth to her meditations. She considers whether drawing can function as another sense that weds looking with an "empathetic sense of touch" (p. 214). She sees drawing as being about pulling inward, "a sense of drawing myself together" (p. 65).

This is a wondrous book, but not one for those looking to identify the weeds they come upon or to learn a

lot about species differences or plant anatomy, though there is botanical information enriching the narrative. However, I see the title *Understorey* as referring to how plants can get under our skin and become parts of our lives, and since weeds are the most ubiquitous of plants, they deserve special notice. And that's just what Chapman gives them by writing about how paying attention to them, really seeing them thoughtfully, enriches the meaning of her daily life. It is difficult to describe how deftly she does this. It is best to experience the book itself. It's a great example of how to become more aware of the plants in our lives, and thus be aware of how important they are to preserve, even the most lowly among them.

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## Member Spotlight

Edited by Will Jones

Technical Services Librarian

Richmont Graduate University, Chattanooga, Tennessee

### Nicole Font

Shelby White & Leon Levy Processing Archivist

LuEsther T. Mertz Library

New York Botanical Garden

### **Where do you work, and what do you do there?**

I am a Shelby White and Leon Levy Processing Archivist at the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG), specifically the LuEsther T. Mertz Library. I'm here on a four-year grant funded by the Leon Levy Foundation to process and digitize the New York Botanical Garden's institutional records, which include all of the records produced by the NYBG as a result of official activities from its inception in 1891 up until the present day (and also moving forward into the future, because people are always producing new records!).

I'm a processing archivist, which means that I house, arrange, describe, and provide access to archival collections. And that work ranges from putting materials into acid-free folders to producing finding aids that help orient researchers to our collections.

### **What kind of materials do you work with day to day?**

Mostly paper records. So far, what I've processed are the records of the Board of Trustees and the papers of various scientists, which are a mixture of paper, photographs, and sometimes you'll even find a little plant matter in them, which is always fun. Right now, I'm working on the records of the Center for Plants, People and Culture, which studies how people and cultures interact with various plants and the natural world primarily.

**What has been your career path? How did you get to where you are?**

I should say, I don't have a botanical or horticultural background. Like, I'm learning as I go [laughs]. So, my junior year of undergrad, I decided I wanted to be an archivist, and started volunteering at my alma mater's archive. I attended St. Peter's University, which is a small Jesuit College in Jersey City, New Jersey. Then, I got an internship with the Bob Dylan Archive, working with an associate archivist based in Greenwich Village, New York. I did a great deal of metadata creation, but I also worked with an extensive collection of Bob Dylan-related ephemera.

After graduating, I went to NYU to get my Master's in Archives and Public History in 2022. While I was doing that, I was still working remotely for the Dylan Archive while also doing projects for the New York Historical Society. I ended up turning my work with a 1966 collection of Bob Dylan fan mail into my master's thesis. From there, I got another grant-funded institutional archives project job at the Center for Brooklyn History, and now I'm here.

**What does a typical day at work look like? What's your favorite part of your job?**

A normal day for me is combing through boxes of material—organizing and rehousing it. If I'm not physically processing a collection, I'm either working on a finding aid, staring at a spreadsheet (which I feel is a lot of my job), or working on papers and presentations about specific facets of the collection.

My favorite part of the job is finding what one of my former colleagues called “cold tea”—basically century-old workplace drama that doesn't really have any consequences anymore. It's just fun.

I can give you an example. There was an artist on staff at the NYBG in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century named Mary Eaton, who left under somewhat curious circumstances. She took all of her illustrations with her when she left, even though technically they were NYBG property. I found correspondence between Eaton and botanist Otto Degener, referring to the NYBG's director-in-chief at the time, E. D. Merrill, as “devil-in-chief,” accusing him of firing her over a private beef with another scientist.

I also love finding those small, unexpected traces of humanity in the archives. These things remind us—among all the correspondence about formal plant identification and official garden business—that the people working here 100 years ago were in some ways just like us. In the records of botanist Elizabeth Britton there's a letter from her friend Cora Clark, with a small photograph of a squirrel affixed to the top corner of the page. And I think, “Hey, I also send pictures of squirrels to my friends!” [Laughs]

**What kinds of plants do you work with, and what types of research are you most excited to support?**

I don't work directly with plants. However, I just mentioned Elizabeth Britton—when I was processing her records, I came across several letters with bits of moss pasted onto the page. That's about as close as I get to working with plants.

Given that I'm not a scientist, I get most excited about research into the NYBG's institutional history. Most people assume our collection strengths are in botanical and horticultural history (and they'd be right!).

But there are so many other stories here. Our archives document women’s history, Black history, immigration and labor history, New York City history, etc. etc. I think helping people tell those stories, and in some cases, telling them myself, is definitely what excites me most!

**Can you share a bit more about the research and writing that you do specifically?**

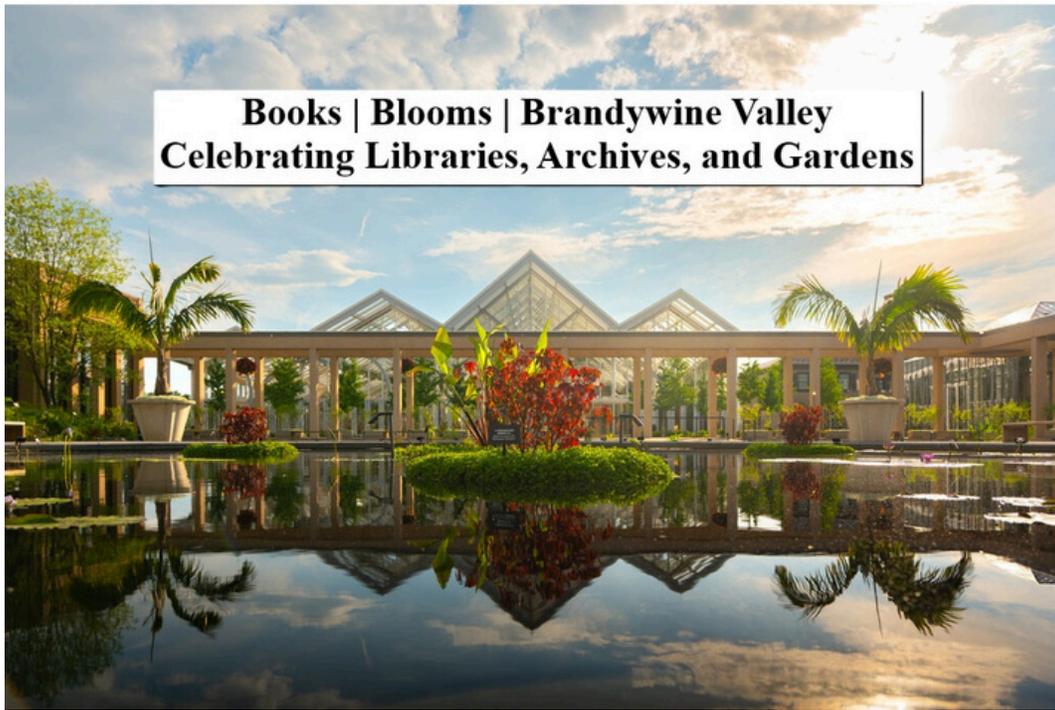
My colleague (reference archivist Ashley Aberg) and I have spent part of the past year working to enhance the voices of women botanists through reparative description work. Many of my early projects here were reprocessing the papers of individual scientists, and I noticed early on that there was a lack of women’s voices in the archives—not necessarily because they don’t exist (even though this is also true in some cases), but because they’ve been undervalued. Some of the finding aids, for example, understated the scientific work of women scientists, presenting their work in a somewhat disparaging way. You got the sense that the archivist didn’t think these women were important because of the work they did, but because they did it despite being women. For example, Elizabeth Britton’s original finding aid uses a lot of adjectives that emphasize her personal qualities: she had “an indomitable will,” “a strong personality.” But her husband’s finding aid is full of action verbs: “he established,” “he launched,” “he founded,” etc. This is a woman who wrote over 300 scientific papers on moss and ferns, so maybe you should talk about that instead of her “indomitable will” or whatever. [Laughs].

**Do you have a favorite plant? A favorite book about plants?**

I won’t say that I have a favorite plant, but I have grown quite fond of mosses. I just think they’re fun, quirky little guys. I am not a bryologist—I can’t tell you anything about mosses, frankly, but I appreciate them. In terms of books, I recently read a novel called *The Island of Missing Trees* [by Elif Shafak, 2021]. It’s a book about a forbidden romantic relationship between a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot. The book is partially narrated by a fig tree, which serves as a sort of living witness to history, remembering things that the human characters either unintentionally forget or actively suppress. By giving the tree a voice, the author suggests that nature records truths that people often try to erase. As an archivist, that’s an especially meaningful message to me.



*Nicole (right) and reference archivist Ashley Aberg (left).*



58th Annual Meeting  
The Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries  
May 12-15, 2026

**Longwood Gardens welcomes The Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries to the beautiful Brandywine Valley**

What better place to be during our nation's 250th birthday than the Philadelphia area – the birthplace of the United States!

With our 2026 meeting's theme **Books | Blooms | Brandywine Valley: Celebrating Libraries, Archives, and Gardens**, we look forward to botanical and horticultural librarians, archivists, and related professionals networking, sharing ideas to elevate their work, and contributing to their professional development.

**Registration is now open, for both in-person and virtual attendance.**

For more details and to register, please visit the conference website:  
<https://cbhl.libguides.com/Longwood2026/>

We hope you'll join us this May in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania!

# CBHL Newsletter, Issue 180, March 2026

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