

BOOKS AND NEW MEDIA

Florida Ethnobotany. Daniel F. Austin. 2004. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida. 909 pp. \$149.95. ISBN 0-8493-2332-0 (cloth).

For a book priced well above one-hundred dollars, one expects a great deal. After a cursory examination, it was obvious this large volume is well worth the price. This book's appeal is to all students of plants and their uses, including health-care professionals, anthropologists, plant taxonomists, and ethnobotanists.

Dan Austin, who has lived and worked in Florida for several decades, relies heavily on his own personal experiences which are scattered throughout. Contrary to most current and recent ethnobotanists such as Balick, Cox, Schultes, and others, who take a Eurocentric view and therefore define ethnobotany as plant uses by "traditional" peoples (read "primitive"), Austin includes uses by all local peoples including Europeans.

The book is divided into two sections: "People and Plants" (pp. 1-53) and "The Ethnobotany" (pp. 54-739).

The first section presents an overview of the native peoples of the state and of adjacent regions including Mexico and California. Also included is a history of Old World "new-comers": Europeans and Africans of the region. Under "Ethnoflora," the early usages of Florida plants are discussed. Austin estimates that probably 100% of the woody flora and at least 50% of other plant species were used by the various inhabitants.

"The Ethnobotany" is the "nuts-and-bolts" section of the book. Plants of Florida known to be used for food, medicine, dyes, building materials, ornaments, or other purposes are listed alphabetically by genus from *Abutilon* (the original source of marshmallows) to *Zornia* (a legume used as a diuretic and laxative). A typical entry includes several common names derived from various languages, followed by its use by ethnic groups of the area. For poisonous or medicinal plants, the active compounds, when known, are given. Taxonomists will appreciate the nomenclature histories, often beginning with Linnaeus. Most of the 900 species are illustrated by line drawings from various sources, especially those of Britton and Brown (1897) and Sargent (1905). There also are 64 species illustrated by full-color photographs.

Florida Ethnobotany is a storehouse of useful information, and contains over 1500 references. I agree with Professor Yoshiaki Yoneda of Shizuoka University, Japan, who stated, "I expect this book will become a model in ethnobotany." As a large percentage of the species featured also occur in Tennessee, the book certainly is of interest to botanists of this state.

LITERATURE CITED

- BRITTON, N. L., AND H. A. BROWN. 1896. An illustrated flora of the Northern United States, Canada, and the British possessions. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
- SARGENT, C. S. 1905. Manual of the trees of North America. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

A People's History of Science: Miners, Midwives, and "Low Mechanics." Clifford D. Conner. 2005. Nation Books, New York. 554 pp. \$17.95. ISBN 1-56025-7482 (paper).

In grade school and beyond we were taught that the history of science is primarily the triumph of famous men. Galileo showed that the earth is not the center of the universe; Newton "discovered" gravity; Darwin convinced most of his peers that plant and animal species including the human species, are not immutable; Einstein's theory of relativity unlocked the mysteries of time and space. According to this approach to science, a few Great Men, most associated with a university (or scientific society), and often using Latin, have made the majority of scientific and technological advances.

In contrast to this "Eureka" approach, Conner contends that many, if not most, discoveries were made instead by "ordinary" people; anonymous, often illiterate, artisans, fisherman, sailors, surveyors, and mechanics. Also included are women who, as midwives made medical advances; and as food gatherers, domesticated the plants on which we depend for food.

Conner is not the first to recognize that, in various areas of science and technology, unheralded individuals, beginning in pre-historic times, have made important contributions. But, he is extra-ordinarily successful in amassing and documenting the evidence (the Bibliography contains about 650 entries, in addition to numerous references at the end of each of the eight chapters) to support his thesis.

A People's History of Science is superbly written. It should be of interest to both historians of science and others, like myself, with broad interests in the sciences.

Conner has taught history in the City University of New York system, but now devotes full time to writing. Nashvillians may be interested to know that he is a graduate of Hillsboro High School and that he recently held a signing of this book at the Davis-Kidd bookstore across the street from the school.

Thomas E. Hemmerly
Department of Biology
Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, TN 37132