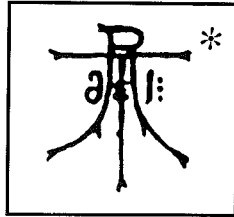


*Newsletter of the*



# FRIENDS OF THE FARLOW

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Carolyn S. Hesterberg, Editor

## Roland Thaxter and the Farlow

As promised in the Spring 1995 newsletter, we offer now a more complete description of the Thaxter archival project and some background information about Roland Thaxter.

The rocky, uncooperative soil and fickle weather of New England produced in the nineteenth century a restless, inquiring eccentric known as the New England Yankee. This individual was personified by the members of the talkative circle centered in Concord, Massachusetts: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson and Louisa May Alcott, and Margaret Fuller. Others less well known today but certainly a part of that "transcendental" tradition, were Celia Loughton Thaxter and her husband Levi Lincoln Thaxter, both scions of old New England families, and both gifted (or cursed) with the burgeoning romantic sensibility of their time and place. Celia Thaxter, in

particular, was a published poet and the instigator and center of an intellectual and artistic salon on Appledore Island off the coast of New Hampshire. So great was her renown she is even mentioned as a caller at the Apley home in John Marquand's novel of the quintessential Boston Brahmin, *The Late George Apley*. Levi Thaxter, though trained as a lawyer, never practiced law but occupied his time with giving public readings and lectures. Among his favorites were dramatic interpretations of Robert Browning from whose "Childe Roland" came the name for their third, and last, son.

Roland Thaxter (b. 1858) grew up primarily in the company of his father and his brother, John (his mother and other brother were frequently together on Appledore Island). Levi had an intense interest in the natural world which is reflected in the journal he kept describing his many outings with his sons. These expeditions took place

\* *R. Thaxter used this insect-like design from his initials to sign his drawings.*

primarily in and around the town of Newtonville, Massachusetts but were also interspersed with trips to more exotic locales, such as Florida and Jamaica. Celia Thaxter wrote in a letter at the time of their Florida excursion thus:

Levi, Lony [Roland's nickname], and John are gone down to Jacksonville, or rather to the state of Florida generally and promiscuously, with powder and shot by the ton, and arsenic and plaster ditto, and camp-kettle and frying pan and coffeepot and provisions and rubber blankets and a tent, and a boat, and three guns, and...heavens only knows what besides. They are to steam down to Enterprise and then take their boat on to the lakes at the end of St. John's River, and then row back in their boat, shooting all the crocodiles, parakeets, mockingbirds, herons, flamingoes, white ibises and every other creature to fall in their way, until they stop in St. Augustine....

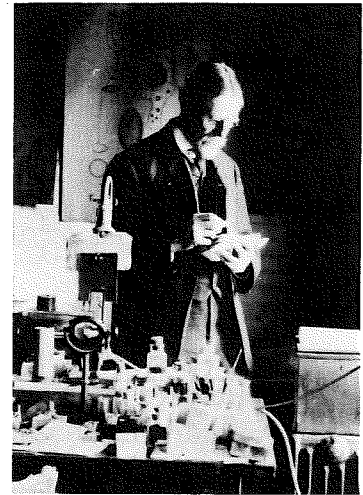
A more benign attitude toward the natural world is expressed in Levi's journal of the same trip along with a particular interest in birds and mosses. Without a doubt, Roland was greatly influenced by his boyhood travels, and always remained close to his father.

Roland published his first entomological paper in 1877, a year before he entered Harvard in 1878. By 1884 he had published five more. The family had by this time moved to a farm at Kittery Point, Maine where Roland's interests in mycology and entomology were to intensify. Kittery Point was to become the source of some of his most important collections, and Thaxter's investigations on them were to lead him to ground-breaking work in the Entomophthorales, Myxobacteria,

Laboulbeniales, and Endogonales.

In the mid-80's he began to work with W. G. Farlow at the Cryptogamic Laboratory. After finishing his thesis on the Entomophthorae in 1888, he married Mabel Freeman and settled down to work at the Connecticut Experiment Station. Here his work on fungicides and their use in the control of plant pathogens gave rise to his development of an applicator which he christened the "Thaxter Squirterette."

Thaxter came to Harvard as a result of W. G. Farlow's desire for a second cryptogamic botanist to work with him and take over some of his teaching duties. Though warned by Farlow that to be a Cambridge professor was to be a drudge, Thaxter assented to the



*R. Thaxter standing at his desk in the Cryptogamic Laboratory*

appointment of Assistant Professor in 1891 and began what was to be a productive research and teaching career until his death in 1932.

Roland Thaxter's interest in insect parasites in general and in particular the Laboulbeniales, a group which he at first believed to be quite small, began he said,

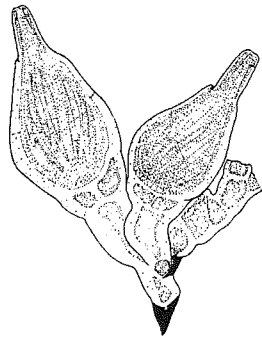
"...[by being] greatly annoyed by losing large numbers of larvae and pupae through the agency of fungi. Having by this means and from other sources accumulated a certain amount of material, it was my first intention to include in my paper all the entomogenous plants recorded from America; yet owing

to many difficulties presented by the ascomycetous forms, involving a careful study and comparison of more abundant material than I could command, as well as by reason of considerable additions to our Entomophthorae resulting from my observations, I have decided to confine myself...to...this family...."

This from his paper on the Entomophthorae of the U.S. published in 1888. By 1890 he was writing specifically on the Laboulbeniaceae, which he defined as

"a small group of fungi, without close affinities among other known Ascomycetes, the members of which are remarkable both in their structure and development, as well as peculiar for their external parasitism upon insects of several orders."

His subsequent papers of the early 1890's describe his realization that the family was much larger than he had first anticipated. In 1896, when the first volume of his



*Cantharomyces haytiensis* described and illustrated by Thaxter

*Contributions toward a monograph of the Laboulbeniaceae* appeared, it contained 243 pages with descriptions of 17 genera and 152 species. Four more volumes followed, three of which were completed during his retirement.

Roland Thaxter's interests were profound and widely spread, and at his death in 1932 much of his work was left unfinished. His miscellaneous notes and papers have been stored in the Farlow archives but, until this past year, had not been conserved, sorted and cataloged.

The bound letters have now been protectively boxed. Ms. Claire Goodwin, through the support of the Friends of the Farlow, has begun the task of organizing this collection. Among the treasures she has found and/or recorded were numerous drawings by Prof. Thaxter executed with such skill and care that they continue to set the standard today for the illustration of the Laboulbeniales. Also in the archives is the journal he kept during his collecting trip to Punta Arenas in 1905. This journal, along with that of his father, Levi (on loan from the Hubbard family), are both undergoing transcription and editorial work at the Farlow.

We would like once more to express our appreciation to Ms. Goodwin, the Hubbard family, and the Friends of the Farlow for their generosity and support of this project.

-CSH

*The author would like to thank Prof. Donald Pfister for permission to draw upon his two articles, "Roland Thaxter: Mycologist and Entomologist" and "Roland Thaxter and the Myxobacteria" for use in the above.*

*All pen and ink illustrations by Prof. Thaxter reproduced throughout this Newsletter are taken from a plate printed in Memoirs of the American Academy vol. XVI, No. 1. 1931.*

## NEWS

Dr. **Vernon Ahmadjian** of Clark University has given to the Farlow Library various books and reprints that were part of the library of Henry Willey (1824-1907), an American lichenologist. Former Friends of the Farlow Graduate Fellow **Ana E. Franco-Molano** acknowledged her FoF support in her paper "Observations on *Rugospora* Heinemann in the Neotropics" published this year in *Mycologia*. **Mimi Harrington**, former FoF fellow, has returned to the Farlow to work on the newly-funded PEET grant which provides graduate training in filamentous ascomycetes, particularly the Sarcoscyphineae. Prof. **Donald H. Pfister** spent 10 days in Beijing, China in November, attending the 10th Anniversary Meeting of the Systematic Mycology and Lichenology Laboratory and the Second China-Korea Joint Seminar for Mycology and is planning a collecting trip to Puerto Rico in January. He is also now serving as President of the Mycological Society of America. Farlow bryologist Dr. **Benito C. Tan** has returned from a two-month trip to several countries in the Pacific rim: first was Sarawak where he gave a presentation; from there he travelled on to Brunei to collect, and then finally on to the Philippines where he spent Christmas with his family. Also as part of the above mentioned PEET grant, new Macintosh computers have been purchased for the Farlow Herbarium which, among other advantages, now link 20 Divinity Avenue to the Internet and the World Wide Web. Another exciting improvement in the Farlow Library has been the installation of new lights above the shelves in the reading room, allowing the removal of the [very ugly] fluorescent

fixtures suspended over each alcove and producing a more equal distribution of illumination (no need anymore for a pocket flashlight held over the card catalog!) In fact, no need to look at the card file at all these days, since all the Farlow Library catalog is now available on HOLLIS [Harvard On-line Library Service]. FoF president **Elizabeth Kneiper** is planning to give a talk to the New England Botanical Club. The title of her presentation will be "Boston Lichens: Then and Now" and will be an overview of changes in Boston's lichen flora based on the Farlow Herbarium lichen specimens. As yet, the date for her talk has not been set.

### Our Fourth FOF Library Exhibit

The FoF exhibit in the display cases at the Godfrey Lowell Cabot Science Library, entitled "Fungi Then and Now: Questions Old and New," mounted by Harriet Provine, was a delightfully creative, mycological challenge for the undergraduate viewers.

Fifteen wide-ranging basic questions about fungi were asked. The answers given to these questions, from Egyptian times to the present, were illustrated with excerpts from a variety of references, from ethnomycology, early mycologists, and current literature and research. Ms. Provine displayed many FoF holdings not otherwise accessible to a large audience: Mayan stone and clay figures from the Tina and R. Gordon Wasson Ethnomycological Collection and color reprints from references such as James Sowerby's 1797 *Coloured Figures of English Fungi or Mushrooms* to

name a few. Microscopes, hand lenses, and various tools used by W. G. Farlow and Asa Gray, from the Historical Scientific Instruments Collection at Harvard, added further to the authenticity of the display. Where necessary, Ms. Provine painstakingly created models of important events in mycology, bringing the past vividly into the present. Her replica of Koch's potato wedge fungal culture is a masterful *trompe l'oeil*.

- E. Kneiper

### NY Natural History Conference IV

The New York State Biological Survey, in cooperation with the New York State Museum Institute, will host the New York Natural History Conference IV at the New York State Museum, Albany, NY, April 24-27, 1996. If you have questions about the conference, please call 518-474-5812, or contact the conference chairman, Dr. Gordon Tucker (e-mail [gtucker2@museum.nysed.gov](mailto:gtucker2@museum.nysed.gov)). For workshop information, contact Dr. John Haines ([jhaines@museum.nysed.gov](mailto:jhaines@museum.nysed.gov)).

### Farlow Visitors

*April 1995 - September 1995*

(Excluding members of the Harvard University community and the F.O.F)

M. Harrington (Ithaca, NY), A. Fife (Christchurch, New Zealand), K. Hunemann (El Paso, TX), L. Pearson (Rexburg, ID), S. Figuera (Worcester, MA), S. Gass (Palo Alto, CA), N. Arnold

(München, Germany), J. Tewari (Edmonton, Canada), I. Tewari (Edmonton, Canada), R. Whitman (Philadelphia, PA), H. Provine (Cambridge, MA), P. But (Hong Kong).

### FoF Financial Report

Balance on hand 7/1/94 -	\$2095.26	
Income		
-Membership	\$4364.00	
-Book Sale	\$1958.32	
		\$6322.32
Expenses		
-Newsletter		
--Printing	\$670.00	
--Postage	\$227.49	
		\$847.49
-Postage (misc.)	\$245.26	
-Guest Speaker	\$212.50	
-Refreshments	\$291.59	
-Library Fund		
--Harrassowitz	\$510.71	
--Acme	\$419.10	
--Maruzen	\$378.00	
		\$1,307.81
-Fellowship		\$354.28
-Misc.	\$185.35	
		\$3494.28
Balance 6/30/95		\$4923.30

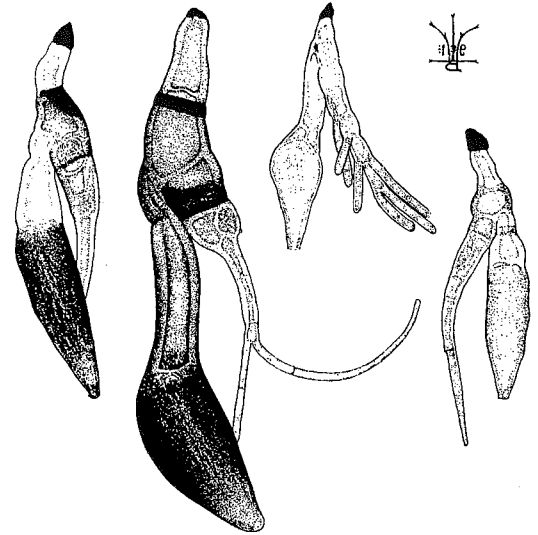
### Endowment Fund

Balance 7/31/93		\$26,647.96
Income	\$1337.39	
Balance 7/31/94		\$27,985.35
Income	\$1433.22	
Balance 7/31/95		\$29,418.57

FIRST CLASS

THE FARLOW REFERENCE LIBRARY AND HERBARIUM  
OF CRYPTOGRAMIC BOTANY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
20 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138 U.S.A.

## FRIENDS of the FARLOW



**Friends of the Farlow** is an international group of amateur and professional botanists concerned with supporting the programs and resources of the Farlow Reference Library and Herbarium of Cryptogamic Botany of Harvard University. Membership categories are: Associate member, \$10-\$24; Full member, \$25-\$49; Sponsor, \$50-\$99; Benefactor, \$1000 or more. To join, please make your check payable to the **Friends of the Farlow** and send to the address below. The membership year runs from January 1st to December 31st. Members receive a discount on Farlow publications and services, participate in book sales, annual meetings and other events, and receive a special welcome at the Farlow. This newsletter is published twice a year, in the spring and fall. For more information, contact the Farlow Herbarium, 20 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA (Tel. 617-495-2368; Fax. 617-495-9484).