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The Parry Herbarium

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The collections of Dr. C. C. Parry are of scientific importance because they include types of numerous plant species from the western United States and Mexico. The Parry herbarium, presently housed at Iowa State University, includes about 18,000 specimens. Earlier reports indicated the Parry collection numbered 30,000 specimens and "not less than 15,000 species." A brief history of the collection is reported. It is probable that Parry's partial dispersal of his collection and his inadequate record keeping resulting in an overestimation of the number of his specimens are cause for the conflicting figures in the literature.

INDEX DESCRIPTORS: Herbarium, C. C. Parry, taxonomy, botanical exploration, western American botany.

Dr. C. C. Parry (1823-1890) was "born in England, educated in America, a medical student of Dr. Torrey, the equal, if not the greatest, of all North American botanical explorers" (Rogers, 1944). Biographies include those by Parry (1878), Orcutt (1890), Preston (1897), Ewan (1950), and Jepson (1962). Though Parry's collection includes plants of Iowa, it is primarily known for the numerous types of plants of the western United States and Mexico. This fact has stimulated a continuing interest in the history and contents of the herbarium. The Parry herbarium is now housed in the Herbarium of Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, where it is maintained as a separate collection.

Reports about the number of specimens in the Parry herbarium are conflicting. The author of a note in the 1879 Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club stated that the collection contained 30,000 specimens (Anon.). Farquharson (1879) reported that the collection "numbering not less than 15,000 species" was deposited in the herbarium of the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences by Parry.

After Dr. Parry's death, Mrs. E. R. Parry (1891) offered the collection for sale indicating that there were 18,000 specimens of 6,780 species including the following:

	Specimens	Species
North American plants	15,800	5,290
Mexican plants	1,430	770
European plants	540	490
North African plants	200	200
South American ferns	37	37

It is not known how Mrs. Parry obtained possession of the collection. There does not seem to be any record of this circumstance at the Davenport Academy. In the report of the Board of Trustees of Iowa Agricultural College (now Iowa State University) for 1894, the Trustees voted to purchase the Parry collection for \$5,000 (Iowa Agricultural College, 1894). The collection was reported to contain 18,000 specimens at that time.

The fire which razed the old Main building on the campus of Iowa State College on 7 December 1900 destroyed some specimens, but "fortunately, most of the Parry collection was saved" (Pammel *et al.*, 1927).

I recently estimated the number of plants in the Parry collection by counting the number of specimens on 3 shelves in each of 6 cases. The average number on each shelf (113) was multiplied by the number of shelves in each case (26) and multiplied by the number of cases (6) containing the collection. The total number of specimens (17,628) is approximately equal to the number reported by Mrs. Parry. Did the collection at one time actually include 12,000 more specimens? If so, the missing plants may 1) remain at the Davenport Academy, or 2) have been disposed of by Parry or someone else after his death. Alternatively, the 30,000 figure is in error and the extra 12,000 specimens never existed.

I have recently conversed with Mr. Cartwright, the director of the Putnam Museum (formerly Davenport Public Museum and Davenport

Academy of Sciences) who informed me that the only record of Parry specimens leaving the museum was the shipment to Iowa Agricultural College, and that there are very few plant specimens in the museum at this time.

Some specimens were given away by Parry to other collectors. Preston (1897) stated that Parry contributed "largely to the collections of his botanical friends and of various societies at home and abroad." McVaugh (1956) cited the distribution of plants collected by Parry and Edward Palmer as a point of friction between the two after Parry donated a "complete set to Kew for nothing" in 1878. Parry also sold some of his collections. In Parry's papers (held in the Special Collections of the Iowa State University Library) there are several responses to advertisements placed by Parry to sell specimens from his collections. It is not possible to determine whether Parry gave away or sold plants from the collection deposited with the Davenport Academy, but he did distribute collections made after 1878.

Ewan (1950) noted Parry's lack of attention to record keeping. Indeed, many of the specimens in the Parry herbarium have no collector number, and little or no information concerning locality or date of collection. His field notebooks are interesting reading for descriptions of the country through which he traveled, but give little information concerning the plants he collected.

It is therefore conceivable that Parry did not know how many specimens he had in his collection. Possibly the 30,000 figure was an overestimation of the size of the original collection. Most likely, a combination of Parry's dispersal of his collections and inadequate record keeping are cause for the conflicting figures in the literature.

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