



Swiss American Historical Society Review

Volume 38 | Number 2

Article 2

6-2002

Preface

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Recommended Citation

(2002) "Preface," *Swiss American Historical Society Review*. Vol. 38 : No. 2 , Article 2.

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Preface

Over the years as I worked with the plant collections in the Milwaukee Public Museum Herbarium, I often noticed the collector name Th. A. Bruhin on some of the oldest specimen sheets. In 1981, when the Milwaukee Public Museum was preparing an exhibition titled "One Hundred Years of Collections" to commemorate its centennial the following year, I chose several plant specimens collected by Th. A. Bruhin for display. While preparing the label to accompany the specimens, I became curious about this early Wisconsin botanist and I decided to see what I could find out about him.

Specimen label information revealed to me that in the 1860s he was in Austria and that by the early 1870s he had come to America and was collecting in the vicinity of New Coeln (later annexed to Milwaukee), Wisconsin. An 1876 publication by Bruhin contained a biographical note stating that Reverend Thomas A. Bruhin was born in Switzerland, ordained a Roman Catholic priest and had come to the Milwaukee area in 1869 to serve at St. Stephen's Catholic Church.

Reverend Bruhin didn't waste any time recording his observations of the new surroundings and publishing his findings in the local paper as well as abroad through the Zoological-Botanical Society of Vienna. Plants he brought from Europe and those he collected near Milwaukee, found a home with the Wisconsin Natural History Society. Later, these specimens were to become the first collections of the newly formed Milwaukee Public Museum. He compiled a catalogue of Wisconsin's flora and logged phenological events, observing plants, insects, amphibia and birds. His publications were among the first records documenting the natural world during this early period in the history of Milwaukee and Wisconsin. His records provided a good foundation for succeeding plant studies and therefore, they were often cited in later works.

The endeavors of Reverend Bruhin in Wisconsin are fairly well known through newspaper articles about him and through his scientific and popular publications. However, all records of him seemed to end when he went in 1881 to the Dakota Territory.

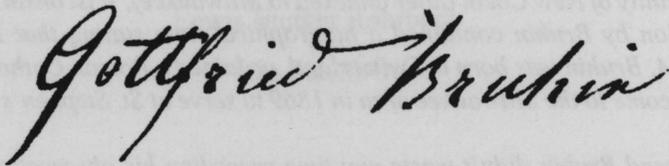
Imagine my astonishment when a colleague from the Herbarium at the University of Wisconsin-Madison contacted me about a letter he had received inquiring about a specimen that had been collected by the writer's grandfather, Thomas A. Bruhin. Although the plant specimen in question was not in our Herbarium, I was eager to find out what had become of this priest-naturalist who had contributed so much to our early understanding of the flora of Wisconsin. Through correspondence with Thomas Bruhin's grandson, Herbert

Bruhin, and his sharing of the information that is in this biography, the legacy of the man whose name is recorded on so many plant specimen sheets as simply Th. A. Bruhin has been brought to light. His talents were many: theologian, poet, naturalist. But it was in botany that he distinguished himself.

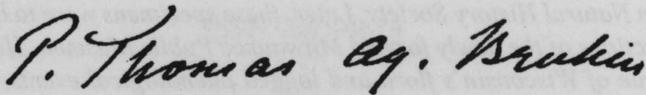
Neil T. Luebke, Curator, Botany Section, Milwaukee Public Museum
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A., Summer 2000

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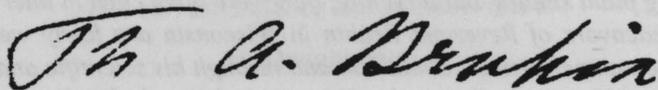
Th. A. Bruhin signatures



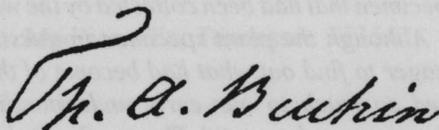
The Student, Gottfried Bruhin, October 15, 1851.



The Young Benedictine, Pater Thomas Aquinas Bruhin, ca. 1861.



The Pastor, Th. A. Bruhin in Potosi, Wisconsin, July 24, 1880.



The Parent, last signature in son Anton's Grade Book, July 1895