



/Mark Graesser

Your Voice

MUN Pensioners' Association (MUNPA) Newsletter • Vol. 19, No. 5, Dec. 2021

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An Urban Weed Botanist

Howard Clase

Nature doesn't require a long drive to see it, it's all around us, even in the city, just walking across from my condo to the Churchill Square shops is a botany field trip for me. My regular "exercise" walks take me around Burton's Pond or down the first section of Rennies Mill River after it runs out from Long Pond. Apart from my annual pilgrimage to Bristol's Hope to see a rare water plant that my late wife, Leila, discovered in 2001 and a few visits to the Botanical Garden and other city spots, this is where I have done most of my botanising in 2021. I call myself an Urban Weed Botanist! This doesn't mean I haven't been seeing any interesting plants though, my list includes two species not known anywhere else in the province and others not commonly found on the Avalon.

One of the books the Hunter Library book group read recently was Barbara Kingsolver's "Unsheltered" which, as well as comparing life under a current demagogue in to USA with that under a local one in Vineland NJ 150 years ago, has introduced me to Mary Treat, a real life botanist and all round naturalist of the 19th century who corresponded with Darwin. It was she who, through hours of patient watching through a microscope, was able to answer Darwin's question as to how the bladderworts actually catch their prey. (There are small hairs at the mouth of the unexpanded bladders that, when touched cause the bladder to expand with a pop, sucking the triggering insect in to its doom!). Her favourite plant, the Curly Grass Fern, is also mine, and I also share the sentiments expressed by her (or more likely Kingsolver) about people not noticing what is around them.

"Why bother with writing sponge-cake prose, then?" Thatcher asked. "You've said the professional journals pay more. You have so many questions of science to pursue. With Charles Darwin and Asa Gray as colleagues."

Mary frowned into the cedars. "It has to be done," she said at last. "Most people look at a forest and say, 'Here are trees, and there is dirt.' They will see nothing of interest unless someone takes them by the hand. I am astonished at how little most people can manage to see."

I have similar thoughts when walking down by Rennies River looking at the wide variety of plants I pass. I realise that my co-exercisers see nothing but trees and weeds and can't put a name to any of them!

Of course the man-created city habitat is quite foreign to most of our native plants, they are mostly restricted to the streams and ponds that haven't been culverted or paved over yet. That doesn't mean that the city streets are devoid of interest though, we have a large collection of urban dwellers that are more or less the same as those in any city with a temperate climate. Our Society's forays into the down-town streets have generated a list of at least 150 species, almost all aliens. Even the lawn in front of my condo has some 25 different "weeds" growing in it – including wild strawberries.

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From the Editor

Happy holidays to all!

I invite you to take a few minutes to spend time with this issue of Your Voice.

Wonderful stories await you and they are all true! We have an extraordinary story of weed findings in unexpected places as described by Howard. Then we move back in time to tales of youth. You might wonder what kind of “weed” Mark was mowing as a drug dealer, and what “high” seas led to Adrian’s shipwreck! I hope your curiosity is peaked and you will take some time to enjoy these stories, and undoubtedly, a chuckle or two!

My best wishes for a peaceful holiday season and a healthy New Year for us all!

Bernadette

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President’s Message

As I was drafting this message, I received notification that Melissa Barker, from the Corner Brook area, was selected as the recipient of the MUNPA entrance scholarship for the 2021-22 scholarship year. Congratulations to Melissa as she embarks on the next stage of her education. We wish her well in whatever career path she follows.

The MUNPA entrance scholarship is one of the many ways that MUNPA contributes to the Memorial University community. Of course we all see the excellent programs that the Association offers for its members and others, and we very much enjoy activities such as our Christmas social that allow us to renew old contacts and make new ones among our colleagues. However, MUNPA members also contribute in many other ways. Newly retired faculty often maintain research programs and support graduate students. Many retirees play an important role as volunteers with groups such as the campus food bank, and members of the MUNPA Board sit on Memorial’s Pension Committee and the Benefits Committee. Others act as liaisons with MUNFA, NAPE and CUPE, as well as with the College and University Retirees Association of Canada.

Those are only a few examples of the ways in which MUN Pensioners contribute both to our University and to the wider community around us; I am sure there are many more. As this year draws to a close, I encourage all of you to reflect and think about what you can do to enrich your community in the new year, as well as to enrich your own lives. Please check our website regularly for information on upcoming MUNPA activities. While COVID still makes face-to-face meetings challenging, virtual presentations allow for larger audiences and are often easier to ‘attend’. I hope to see you, one way or another, as we move into 2022.

Grant Gardner

MUNPA West Beneficiaries Luncheon

The MUNPA West Program Committee hosted a luncheon for three local beneficiaries of deceased Grenfell retirees on October 19, 2021. This was held at the Gunnel, the newly opened and renamed restaurant, formerly The Mamateek Inn, overlooking Corner Brook and the Humber Arm - one of the best views of Corner Brook. (Grenfell Campus can be seen in the distance.) The food was very good and we all enjoyed catching up on everyone's news.

Ferriss Hodgett and Ian Mennie both taught physics on the St. John's Campus of MUN before coming to Grenfell (then the West Coast Regional College) when it opened in 1975. John Ashton joined Grenfell in Folklore a few years later, before becoming Principal.



Seated left to right around the table: Kathleen Snow, MUNPA committee; Mary Sparkes, MUNPA Board member Edna Hodgett, wife of Ferriss Hodgett; Sharon Walsh, MUNPA committee; Maureen Mennie, wife of Ian Mennie; Lois Bateman, MUNPA alternate Board member; Sheila Ashton, wife of John Ashton.

Memorial in Motion – Perennial Fundraising Champs

Memorial in Motion is the championship team in the fall fundraising event of the East Coast Trail. The team consists mostly of Memorial retirees. Here they are enjoying their first-place prize at Bannerman Brewery on November 1. They are (left to right) Shelly Birnie-Lefcovitch, Jim Millan, Steve Wolinetz, Dick Ellis, Robert Sexty and Evan Simpson.



Next time you go out, look at the side-walk cracks and the curbside, there is probably something green growing there. If you look closely, you may see two or three different kinds of leaves and in the summer some tiny flowers. Each one of those is a different species with its own name. Do you know what they are though?

Here are some of the more unusual plants that I have found.

Avalon rarities 1. Scarlet Pimpernel, *Anagalis arvensis*.

Discovered in 2020 by Catherine Barrett by the roadside near her home on Donovan's Rd, The Goulds. This small patch reappeared this year in the same spot. It's an annual so it has reseeded itself. You can see a seed capsule forming on the left near the top. The tiny scarlet flowers are about 5 mm across and only open on warm sunny days. This is the only location currently known in Newfoundland, but it has been recorded once before at St Catherines, St Mary's Bay. One of the delights of my childhood in Wiltshire. There is also a rare blue form.



Scarlet Pimpernel

Avalon Rarities 2. Lawn Daisy, *Bellis perennis*.

One Saturday morning, when turning off Stavanger Drive to meet some friends in The Second Cup I noticed a white patch on the verge outside Montana's. When I went to investigate I found another childhood memory. These daisies grow in profusion on most English lawns, but in Newfoundland I have only seen them in Corner Brook previously – although there is an old record from The St John's area. The flowers are only 15 - 20 mm across, much smaller than the more familiar Oxe-eye or Scentless Mayweed daisies. The leaf

rosette fans out low, well clear of any mower blades and the flowers are quickly replenished. It spreads readily by division as well as seed.



Lawn Daisy

Avalon Rarities 3. Hairy Galinsoga, *Galinsoga quadriradiata*.

This scrawny little plant with flowers only about 4 mm across is our smallest daisy. Hailing originally from S. America, it probably arrived here via Europe where it is a frequent city weed. It's established in all other Canadian Provinces, but apparently not here. I first noticed it behind the now demolished Dominion Store in Churchill Square. But it has managed to hang on in two nearby locations: this one, by a parking sign in the Square, and another on the far side of the Aliant building. It seems to like growing in cracks in concrete!



Hairy Galinsoga

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Avalon Rarities 4. Dwarf Scouring-Rush.
Equisetum scirpoides.

Another scrawny little plant with only one known spot on the Avalon, but native in the more basic areas of the West. (I first came across it on a trail near the Glynmill Inn in Corner Brook.) And we do know exactly how this one got here. In the early days of The MUN Botanical Garden, Lundrigans brought over a load of limestone from the west for the construction of the Limestone Garden. This plant must have stowed away in the load, but no-one noticed it until July 2006 when I took this picture showing the fruiting cones. It's still there on the left of the path as you walk up to the top – but there's no label as it's an undocumented resident.



Dwarf Scouring Rush

Avalon Rarities 5. Spotted Coralroot, *Coral-lorhiza maculata*.

Also in the Botanical Garden, but this time occurring naturally in the wild part of the garden. This orchid has only been reported for a few other locations on the Avalon, but it's very difficult to find as it tends to grow in fairly dark spots, has no leaves and only flowers for a few weeks once every few years. Like the more familiar Ghost Pipes, *Monotropa uniflora*, it is saprophytic. That is that it gets all its nutrients, with the help of a fungus from decaying material in the soil. The only reason it shows itself above ground is to flower and spread its seeds. There is a colony of perhaps 20 or 30 plants at the highest point of Trail 1 (The Yetman Trail) just beyond the point at which it turns down again. Since each plant only flowers rarely, there may be only one or two flower spikes each year. I have only once seen as many as 20. However the

dead spikes from last year are often still standing in July when the new ones appear.

Avalon Rarities 6. Water Horsetail, *Equisetum fluviatile*.

This is the tallest of our ten horsetails, (eight species and two hybrids) and not the rarest, but there is room to squeeze it in and I only know of one location within the city where it's easy to find it – there's a large patch at the west end of Kents Pond right by the trail. It can be over 1 m tall. This picture was taken in mid-June 2020 when the stems were still immature. By July they would have put out side branches up to 15 cm long and be capped by relatively small fruiting cones.

Horsetails are known as scouring rushes because they contain a lot of silica and are quite abrasive. They were used for scouring pots in the kitchen before similar proprietary products became available.



Spotted Coralroot



Water Horsetail

This is an edited version of an article titled "Botany in the Time of Covid," published in **Sarracenia**, the Newsletter of the Wildflower Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, [Vol 23 #3-4](#). Howard is stepping down after editing Sarracenia for 13 years.

Shipwrecked

Adrian Tanner

In 1964 I entered graduate school. This meant a big change in my life. Much of my UBC undergraduate years, beginning in 1959, had been a generally happy-go-lucky time, perusing a dilettante interest in many of the avant-guard movements and happenings of the times. These included anti-Vietnam war demonstrations and teach-ins, and the beat movement. We read Ginsberg's "Howl," Kerouac's "On the Road," and Burroughs' "Naked Lunch." We read the poetry of Kenneth Patchen. We followed the beat's interest in Zen Buddhism, and, together with several of my friends, experimented with mind-altering substances like LSD and peyote. I was part-owner of a jazz club, followed the arts and experimental and art house films, from Bunuel to Stan Brakhage. In short, I was young and foolish, and did some crazy things.

In one such case I had a near-death experience, although not due to any mind-altering substance. One of my friends at the Black Spot Jazz club, who I will call Bob, was an amateur jazz drummer. Bob told me he knew a UBC professor who had asked him if he would sail the man's yacht, which at the time was moored in San Francisco Harbour, back to Vancouver. Bob needed someone to crew with him, and asked me. I had never sailed with Bob before, but assumed that he, like a lot of Vancouverites, had some sailing experience. I had only previously sailed small yachts on the Thames as a kid, but I just assumed I would be able to handle the job.

Bob and I took the bus from Vancouver to San Francisco, where we first sampled all the Jazz clubs. We found the yacht in its mooring, took on board supplies for the week that we thought would last us through the trip, intending to follow a course within sight of the coast. We checked the weather forecast and set sail, passing under the Golden Gate bridge.

Things went wrong very quickly. The winds were stronger than we had expected, and the sails proved to be in very bad shape. First the foresail began to tear away from the rigging, and then the mainsail also began to tear away, while we frantically reefed in the sails. We tried to head back towards the coast with the help of the outboard motor, but that soon became swamped by following waves and stopped working. By then we effectively had little control over the craft. We were being carried out to sea by a strong current. To make things worse for me, I became seasick. Night was falling and we saw that we had drifted close to a major shipping route, with a constant parade of large freighter ships and oil tankers passing us by.

At that point we decided our situation was desperate, so we tried to attract the help of one of these passing vessels with the aid of hand flares. A very large oil tanker saw us, and we somehow managed to get alongside. A rope was thrown to us, which we attached to the base of the mast, and a rope ladder was put over the side. After we were on board the tanker crew attached our yacht to a very long line to tow our yacht. On board we were greeted by the cook who took us to the galley, fed us and gave us a place to sleep.

However, in the morning it was found that the boat was no longer at the end of the long rope - we later heard it had washed ashore near Bodega, California. The tanker dropped us off at Seattle, which was its next port of call, and we returned to Vancouver with our tails between our legs. Fortunately, I did not have to face the UBC professor who was the owner of the yacht.

A Teenage Drug Dealer in Montana

Mark Graesser

You can drive through Boulder in less than five minutes, and forget it in five more.

The Missoulian, June 2, 2014

When I was twelve my family moved from Wise River, a hamlet of about fifty souls, to a town twenty times that size. A city boy now, no more life as a *faux* cowboy.

The prime advantage was supposed to be the presence of a high school. Boulder also had the standard accoutrements of a small Montana town in the 50's: a drug store, two grocery stores, three bars, and myriad churches. For the first time since grade 1, I shared a class in school with a dozen others. Among these peers I early achieved a certain respect by being the first to kill a deer. In those days, a license to kill (deer and elk, at least) was issued at age twelve, no questions asked. I also "got my deer" the next year – just one shot each year did the trick – before losing interest.

Moving to the larger town opened up a range of opportunities to earn spending money. (In Wise River, my brother and I had been limited to peddling worms to visiting fishermen.) To begin with, the only house available in Boulder came with a flock of 200 laying hens (white Leghorns, or "leggers" as they were called). There was also one rooster, which the elderly widow apparently kept to please the "girls." My parents decided the keeping of these cluckers would be a suitable responsibility for me.

Oddly, I don't remember participating in this decision by senior management. It meant feeding the hens two times a day, regular removal of manure, and maintaining fires in wood-burning stoves to keep them from freezing

in the sub-zero months. Not to mention daily egg collection, candling and grading the eggs, and packing them for sale. The funny thing is, I don't have any recollection of getting rich from this operation. However, laying hens are only productive for two or three years, and it was agreed that at the end of this time I would liquidate the flock without replacement, a process which doesn't bear description in a family paper such as this. The rooster was the first to go.

More enjoyable was work I picked up mowing lawns for neighbours for the princely rate of \$1 per hour. We had a large garden at home, so my father purchased a "Merry Tiller" garden tractor with a variety of attachments for plowing, sod cutting, weed mowing,

etc. The services of this machine were soon in demand all over town at a rate of \$3 per hour. Somehow, an understanding was reached with my father that I would get to keep \$1 as the "operator," but would pay him \$2 as the "owner" of the machine. Welcome to the world of capitalism.

Speaking of which, a few years later in my high school "social studies" class, I recall the teacher posing the question: "What is capitalism?" A classmate, from a wealthy ranch family, responded brightly: "I'm not sure, but I think it's something like communism."

My earnings from these activities enabled me to purchase the object of my dreams, a red "English racer" bicycle, with skinny tires, caliper brakes and 3-speed gears. This greatly enhanced my mobility, although I really didn't have much of anywhere to go. I also bought a .22 target



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rifle, and spent time with a buddy wandering the countryside shooting small rodents.

Sixteen was another key enabling age: I qualified for a driver's license. No sooner was this in hand than I was offered a job at one of the grocery stores driving the delivery truck. After school every day I would spend a couple of hours buzzing around town trundling baskets of groceries. If the customer wasn't at home, I was expected to place the perishables in the fridge and make sure the rest was out of reach from the dog or cat. This evolved into full-time work during the summer, doing the full range of grocery shop tasks.

After a couple of years at this, I was recruited by the local drug store to work as a clerk. Among the many products sold in the store were magazines and paperback books. George, the owner, soon put me in charge of that department. Products were ordered from distributors; after a period of time, the covers of unsold copies were torn off and returned for credit. The magazines and books were supposedly discarded. Be that as it may, I made a point of ordering lots of science fiction magazines, for which there was little demand in Boulder, and enjoying the proceeds no less for their want of covers. Likewise, I discovered that Bantam Books had a line of "classics" (Tolstoy, Stendhal, and the like). This was a considerable upgrade on the fare available in the school library. However, when I presented my English teacher with a coverless copy of *The Red and the Black* for a proposed book review, she dismissed it as "paperback trash," until I produced evidence from an encyclopedia that it was genuine "literature."

The Methodist minister was given to reading the more popular volumes (think *Peyton Place*) cover to cover while standing for hours next to

the display rack. Being loyal Methodists – and friends of Reverend Bob – George and I had no inclination to interrupt his studies.

The pharmacy department, of course, was off limits to me, especially the narcotics which were locked in an ancient vault. However, I was often left on my own to sell anything else in the store, with whatever advice I wished to add. This being the late 50's, what later came to be referred to as "feminine hygiene products" were rarely mentioned by name. My job was to wrap the individual boxes in plain brown paper (I never knew quite why), to be placed near the check-out for discreet purchase. Likewise,

the modest stock of "preventatives" (I don't think I even heard the word "condom") were in a drawer beneath the cash register, to be extracted in response to the telling wink, nod, and sideways glance.

There was a small cinema, the Rialto, which put on two or three features a week, with a full complement of news

reels, cartoons and excellent popcorn. I earned all the free passes I could use cleaning out the premises mornings after. My brother was the projectionist, and the subject of raucous catcalls when the apparatus failed. I've always had a nostalgic liking for *Cinema Paradiso* from this connection.

And so it was, as a mere teenager, that I enjoyed benign access to most of the homes, and other affairs, of the residents of this dusty little western burg. Shades of *The Last Picture Show*? We won't go there...

Before Wise River and Boulder, I lived in nearby Dillon, Montana. This is the locale of the film "The Power of the Dog," recently released on Netflix to considerable acclaim. The setting is a ranch in an area named Horse Prairie, which I remember from my first camping trip around age 5. Although filmed in New Zealand, the Jane Campion movie captures perfectly the landscape and cowboy ambience of my early childhood. (The intense psychological drama is another matter.)



Boulder Valley, 1968

/Mark Graesser