

# HUNTIA

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## Book Reviews and Announcements

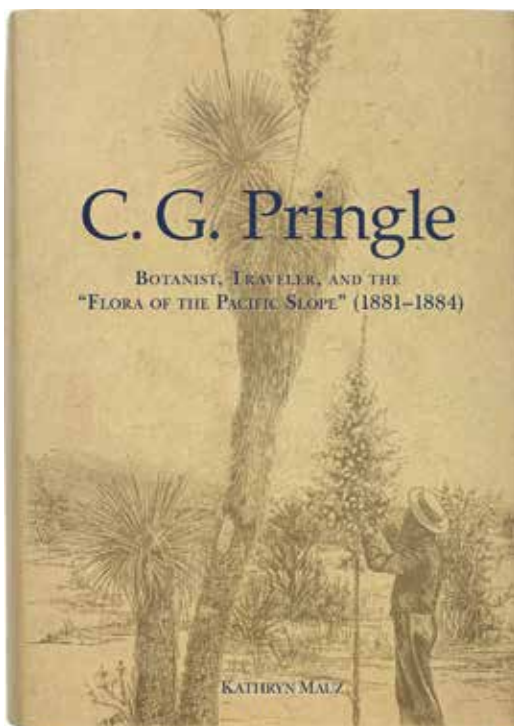
**Mauz, Kathryn.** *C. G. Pringle: Botanist, Traveler, and the "Flora of the Pacific Slope," (1881–1884).* (Memoirs of The New York Botanical Garden, vol. 120, Heritage Series, no. 3.) Bronx, New York: New York Botanical Garden Press, 2018. xxii, 737 p., 67 uncol. pl., port. frontisp., maps. \$129.99 (US). ISBN 978-0-89327-556-3 (hardback).

I first encountered Cyrus Guernsey Pringle (1838–1911) about 15 years ago when we used a photograph of him in his Vermont herbarium for the Database page on our Web site. I wrote a short biography from our secondary sources, which was not ideal but had to be done given limited resources and time constraints. I had this tantalizing glimpse of a botanist with a western story but no way to take a closer look. Years later I came across a photograph of Pringle by a wagon with a stack of specimens. The American Civil War and the American West are my personal areas of interest, but here was a different perspective on the West and its popular cowboys. When the email arrived asking if we would be interested in reviewing the book, I knew I was interested in reading it, but I did not plan to get roped into doing the review. Then I opened the book and found Pringle's wagon on the endpapers. In no time we were rattling along in that wagon.

The journey began in Vermont. Drafted on 13 July 1863 after a costly Union victory at Gettysburg, Pringle, a Quaker, refused to fight or pay a fine, which would have been used for the war effort. A nation in the grip of war fever has no patience with a conscientious objector until the killing ends and the horror and regret set in. The author skipped too quickly over this period in Pringle's life for my tastes, but Pringle's *The Record of a Quaker Conscience* (1918) is available online as a PDF for further reading.

By 1874 Pringle was corresponding with other botanists and collecting plants for them in Vermont. He went to the woods and, like others before him, found himself and something more, a potential career. His descriptions of the experience captured the current popular concept of "being present" or what his near-contemporary Thoreau (1817–1862) found at Walden,

Among all the joys which my chosen occupations yield I think I know of none quite



so deep and pure as those which a day in the deep mossy woods, by the silent margin of some blue lake, or on the wild, lone rock of some mountain summit, comfort as the true student of nature... experiences of wild life calculated to fill one with large thoughts, to raise him above fear and to make the modern world of convention and fads show paltry (pp. 8, 9).

It was good that Pringle found such peace in the woods because the next year he began collecting trees for George Vasey (1822–1893) and the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and that led to collecting trees in Vermont, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and West Virginia for Charles Sprague Sargent (1841–1927)

and the census of American forests. As part of the census Sargent and George Engelmann (1809–1884) spent four months on the Pacific Slope in 1880. Also, Morris Ketchum Jesup (1830–1908) mused to Sargent about the possibility of a collection of woods of the United States. As this solidified into the Jesup Collection of North American Woods at the American Museum of Natural History, Sargent now had another job for Pringle—“Go west, young collector”—and dispatched him to collect tree specimens along the Pacific Slope.

Pringle arrived in Tucson, Arizona, on 5 April 1881 and shortly thereafter purchased a two-horse team and wagon. Now the real adventure could begin. Initially he was worried about snakes and the Apache, but he did not encounter these mainstay antagonists of pulp westerns during any of his trips to the Pacific Slope. He did encounter cranky taskmasters with unrealistic expectations for the scope and magnitude of the projects, competitive collectors, several loyal supporters and a country filled with breathtaking beauty and flourishing flora.

Everyone underestimated the time and difficulty in getting the tree specimens for Sargent’s census and museum projects. Sargent and Engelmann had covered this area in four months and seemed to think Pringle

would do the same. Pringle pleased Engelmann with a thorough study of *Cupressus* but frustrated Sargent because other trees could have been collected in that time. It was difficult for me to grasp that Pringle really was collecting trees, not fallen branches or bits of bark. Cutting down the tree to show it existed seemed counterintuitive, but then this was the apex of the logging industry. In fact Pringle secured a few specimens at sawmills. (Our director assured me that tree specimens are no longer collected in this manner.) These specimens were logs often six to seven feet in length and sometimes over five feet in diameter. It took days to cut, transport and package a specimen for shipment to the East by rail. Those shipments often weighed several thousand pounds.

Meanwhile Pringle was collecting plants for himself to sell, which Sargent knew but Jesup, who was funding the collections for the museum, may not have realized. At one point Pringle distributed 22 sets of 500 species. By his last trip, he planned for 50 sets for his enthusiastic patrons, lamenting, “But what a labor to sit down and put up 50 selected specimens of every plant you meet as you travel” (p. 311). While trying to understand just how many plants Pringle was collecting in any given area, I talked with our director, who said that Pringle likely was depleting areas to fill his sets since this was before





the era of ecology. Therefore, we will not look behind the wagon at the empty spaces in our wake.

Pringle was collecting many new species, which are well detailed in the appendices, but he did not always collect alone. This begged the question: If four collectors see a new plant at the same time, who names it? One would expect good manners and the Code to govern inclusion of all four as authorities. The first one out of the wagon was not strictly scrupulous, and the International Code of Nomenclature was not the guiding light that it is now. Instead of Colts at High Noon, they followed the Code of the West and shot it out in the pages of botany journals and in volumes of personal correspondence for years.

Although he finally quit Sargent, Pringle did not quit collecting or quit the area. After all, he had patron requests to fill. However, he had time for new interests. Pringle developed an interest in photography, and his photographs give a more intimate feel to the last leg of this adventure. Several times he photographed his wagon, calling it his “home on wheels” (p. 252). Frank Stephens (1849–1937), an ornithologist, joined Pringle for this trip and kept a journal. It was like having a seat in that crowded, dusty wagon as they traveled among the cacti. Although Pringle’s Pacific Slope adventure drew to an end in 1884, in February 1885 he trundled off, perhaps not exactly into the sunset, in his wagon to more fully explore the Mexican flora. The adventure concluded with a self-portrait of Pringle and his wagon, the very

same photograph that captivated my imagination years ago. Pringle did not disappoint.

Author Kathryn Mauz made exquisite use of primary sources. My only quibble is more a choice of house style. To compensate for the fact that Pringle did not keep a journal of his travels, Mauz quoted Sargent and Engelmann describing an area they visited previously as Pringle was visiting it for the first time. That is where I would have liked to see the citations following the quoted text in author–date citations instead of endnotes. In a book of this size constantly flipping to the notes section is impractical. The use of the photographs follows a similar vein as the quotations. While the photographs are contemporary with Pringle, illustrating many of the places he visited, they are not by him until near the end of the book. However, it is difficult to complain about seeing photographs by Carleton E. Watkins (1829–1916). The book was very well edited, but the marketing copy on the dust jacket would have benefited from the same deft hand. I guess at most organizations the journal editor does not also do the marketing. While botanical history is generally marketed within the botanical community, Pringle’s story deserves a wider audience. The text without the appendices could be repackaged and marketed as a stand-alone book. It would not be a commercial success, but few things worth reading really are.

—Scarlett T. Townsend, *Huntia* Editor

